

Annual 'Change the World' event coming up in May

Advocate

Virginia United Methodist

\$2.00

April 2012



2012 General Conference

Two key issues rise to the surface for gathering in Tampa

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

— Virginia Conference Vision Statement

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©2012 Virginia Advocate
National award-winning newsmagazine
USPS 660-740 ISSN 0891-5598

Published monthly by Virginia United Methodist Communications, Inc., an agency of the Virginia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. Periodical postage paid at Glen Allen, Va., and at additional mailing offices. The Virginia United Methodist Advocate is owned by Virginia United Methodist Communications, Inc.

POSTMASTER: Send changes of address to Virginia United Methodist Advocate, P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058. Editorial and business offices are located at 10330 Staples Mill Rd., Glen Allen, Va. Mailing address: P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058. Telephone: 1-800-768-6040, ext. 110; local (804) 521-1100. Fax: (804) 521-1173, E-mail: <advocate@vaumc.org>. Office hours are 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

What's ahead at General Conference? God only knows



Neill Caldwell
Editor

Recently I prepared a sheet of important issues for a group of students from Shenandoah University and the conference's *Calling 21* program who will be attending General Conference in Tampa as observers. When I wrote about the discussion over "guaranteed appointments" for elders, somehow my spell-checker changed that phrase to "quarantined appointments."

I am sure there are a lot of pastors – and many church members – who have thought about being "quarantined" at one time or another.

Such are General Conference battles over changing our holy *Book of Discipline*... One word can mean a lot.

Our quadrennial United Methodist gathering is part circus, part revival, part marathon race. There is an excitement in being a part of wonderful worship and preaching, incredible music, seeing a phalanx of interpreters converting English into French, Portuguese and other languages spoken by our global United Methodist brothers and sisters.

The Rev. Tom Albin, whose call for prayer support for 2012 General Conference leads our preview section beginning on the following page, says "many United Methodist Church members feel detached from General Conference. Prayer is a way to connect."

Everything needs to start with prayer. And the second step is listening, to the voice of God and to one another. God promises wisdom if we only ask for it.

I can't predict outcomes (look for those in our June issue), but this *Advocate* can present some of the key issues that will see a great deal of debate and discussion during this gathering.

At the recent news briefing at the Tampa Convention Center, Laura Nichol, a lay member from Houston who is an expert on organizational leadership, pointed out that "there are 1,382 occurrences of the word 'shall' in the *Book of Discipline*, but 4,823 'shall not's.' We need to go more to 'shalls,' and free up our leaders." One thing I've learned is that positivity does create more "buy-in," which is kind of a corporate word for connectionalism.

I can't tell General Conference delegates how to vote, but here are some things I think I think: Our wonderful United Methodist connectionalism needs to be made stronger, not weakened. We need better accountability for pastors, bishops, even laypersons. We need to make it easier for people who feel a call to ministry to enter the ordination process, while retaining the many checks along the way that ensure quality clergy. We need to target youth and young people in recruiting clergy but also in recruiting people who will simply come to worship. We need to turn around and focus outwardly, as Leonard Sweet advises, and not inwardly. We must respect one another's opinions and viewpoints. The church must become relevant again.

"People are tired of business as usual," adds Albin. "We are not achieving God's dream of a beloved community."



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Neill Caldwell

A Call to *Pray* for General Conference

By Tom Albin

The beauty of being a part of a connectional church is that we can call on one another to pray and support each other in prayer. As the 2012 General Conference approaches, it is important to know our prayer foundation is firm and we are connected in a global prayer network.

Prayer is the foundation for Christian discipleship and the essence of United Methodist spirituality. The Wesley brothers taught us “a sincere desire is an authentic prayer.”

Frances Jennings of the Florida Conference and I co-lead the General Conference Prayer Support team that is calling every United Methodist member and congregation, in every state and every nation, to surround and support General Conference in prayer. I am convinced the one thing every United Methodist can do to influence the outcome of this General Conference is to lift it to the Lord in prayer.

In partnership with The Upper Room, the Prayer Support team is providing “50 Days of Prayer for the General Conference,” a daily prayer resource available free as an e-pub, e-mail subscription or downloadable PDF. Our goal is to have the entire United Methodist Church membership praying with the elected delegates and praying for God’s will to be done, in God’s way and in God’s time.

Significant spiritual preparation and planning are taking place to create prayer support for General Conference. Every United Methodist member can participate in this global prayer movement. Whether you are sitting in your home or participating at the Tampa site, your prayers will influence the future of our church. Here is how you can get involved:

- Visit the prayer Web site maintained by the General Board of Discipleship, <<http://50daysofprayer.upperroom.org>>. It contains information, guidance and suggestions to help United Methodists pray together in new and meaningful ways.
- Use the resource “50 Days of Prayer Before and During the General Conference.” Download a free e-book or PDF version, or subscribe to the daily e-mail at the Web site.
- Organize a prayer vigil in your local church, cluster or district. Consider praying throughout the hours that General



The Rev. Tom Albin preaches at the pre-General Conference news briefing at the Tampa Convention Center in January. Albin is dean of The Upper Room. UMNS photo/Mike DuBose

Conference is in session (April 24-May 4 from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.).

- Conduct a commissioning service for intercessors on Sunday, March 11. Use the online commissioning service for members committing to 50 days of prayer for General Conference and all who will participate in a prayer vigil.
- Contribute to social media sites. Visit the Facebook page “2012 UMC General Conference Prayer Ministry” and Twitter @GC2012Pray to participate in conversation about this prayer movement.
- Make a mantle of prayer for the delegates and leaders to serve as a physical symbol of the prayers of United Methodists around the world. United Methodists in Florida and across the connection are creating these handmade mantles from silk.



Sandy Weber, a member of Hermitage UMC in Nashville, wears a prayer mantle.

John and Charles Wesley taught the early Methodist people, “God does nothing apart from prayer.” The Bible is equally clear, “Unless God builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” [Psalm 127:1]

Friends, our prayers are needed for this General Conference. There is more potential for significant change to occur this year than at any other time since 1968. We pray because Jesus promised that if we ask, seek and knock, we will receive an answer and the doors will open.

As we ask, pray, seek and listen, I believe God will act and The United Methodist Church will be transformed. □

—The Rev. Tom Albin, a clergy member of the Oklahoma Conference, is dean of The Upper Room and director of ecumenical relations. He is co-chair of the Prayer Support Team for General Conference.



Two big disputes ahead

for General Conference

Restructuring, guaranteed appointments top issues for 2012 gathering in Tampa

Two proposals hover near the top of the controversy list as The United Methodist Church approaches 2012 General Conference. The first would restructure the denomination, including consolidating nine of the church's 13 general agencies under a 15-member board. The second would end appointment guarantees for ordained elders in good standing.

General Conference will have final say on the proposed changes. However, the proposals already are drawing scrutiny from United Methodist groups across the theological spectrum, and those groups will be out in force at General Conference to advocate their points of view.

Both proposals aim to address four decades of declining United Methodist membership in the United States. Legislation to restructure the denomination originated with the "Call to Action" process. The Study of Ministry Commission drafted the legislation to alter "security of appointment" for elders, a move endorsed by bishops and other "Call to Action" leaders.

Almost everyone agrees the denomination needs to change. Where views differ is how best to go about it.

In general, leaders of the denomination's unofficial progressive groups fear the recommended restructuring will lessen the church's commitment to ethnic diversity and minimize programs that foster church growth, particularly among people of color.

The recommended restructuring "isn't United Methodist, and it isn't Wesleyan," said Donald Hayashi, who worked with the Methodist Federation for Social Action, a denomination-wide progressive caucus, in drafting an

alternative reorganization that has been submitted.

Meanwhile, leaders of evangelical groups see the restructuring as a cost-saving measure that will put more focus on local congregations. "We believe that a lot of the proposals are moving us in the right direction," said the Rev. Thomas Lambrecht, vice president and general manager of denomination-wide evangelical caucus Good News.

Although often on opposing sides, some progressives and evangelicals share misgivings about legislation to eliminate "security of appointment" for elders in good standing. "We're concerned that pastors (might) become vulnerable to arbitrary decisions on the part of bishops and cabinets," Lambrecht said.

Reorganization

A number of studies over the past four years have showed that the denomination's status quo is unsustainable. While the church is growing worldwide, particularly in Africa and the Philippines, the U.S. membership has declined by 29 percent since 1968, going from 10.7 million members to fewer than 8 million. The U.S. membership still provides most of the denomination's financial support.

The initial legislation to restructure the denomination's agencies came out of the "Call to Action" process, initiated by the Council of Bishops and Connectional Table to "reorder the life of the church."

The proposed agency — the United Methodist Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry — would combine the functions of nine general agencies — the Board of Discipleship; Board of Higher Education and Ministry, Board of Global Ministries, Board of Church and Society, Commission on Religion and Race, Commission on the Status and Role of Women, Commission on Archives and History, Council on Finance and Administration and United Meth-



The Rev. Tom Lambrecht, Good News

odist Communications, which operates United Methodist News Service. The work would be organized into offices of congregational vitality, leadership excellence, missional engagement, justice and reconciliation and shared services.

The hope is that the consolidation will eliminate walls of separation, competition for responsibilities and redundant activities among the agencies, said Illinois Area Bishop Gregory Palmer, a leader in the “Call to Action” process. A “more nimble, cost-effective and focused” agency structure would in turn help annual conferences foster more vital congregations, he said.

However, Hayashi – who is also president of the National Federation of Asian American United Methodists – said the proposed reduction of agency governing boards from more than 400 people to 15 would “effectively eliminate racial/ethnic leaders on the agency boards.”

He pointed out that ethnic minorities, particularly Latinos, account for the greatest population growth in the United States. “This offers the greatest opportunity for church growth, but they don’t offer high income. Will they be a priority?”

Evangelicals take a different view. Reducing the size of boards and agencies can help local congregations by reducing what they pay to support the general church, said Patricia Miller, executive director of the Confessing Movement, an evangelical caucus. “I think there are more efficient ways to deal with the issues of boards and agencies,” she said. “Boards and agencies can help with programs, but the actual ministry takes place at local churches.”

Lambrecht also said Good News favors the “emphasis on local church vitality.”

In the proposed legislation, the board of the newly created United Methodist Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry would be accountable to a 45-member advisory board called the General Council for Strategy and Oversight. This council would replace the 60-member Connectional Table, which coordinates the denomination’s mission, ministries and resources.

The legislation designates that the 45-member council board should include one member from each of the seven central conferences. The board’s 41 voting members also will include five bishops, five members from the denomination’s ethnic caucuses, three representatives from the Advisory Committee on Ministries with Young People and 21 members elected from jurisdictions in proportion to their jurisdictions’ membership.

“You have the Southeastern and South Central jurisdictions getting the lion’s share of the vote,” said the Rev. Steve Clunn, Methodist Federation for Social Action’s coalition coordinator.

Lambrecht expressed similar worries. “I am not sure the 45-member General Council is large enough to be actually representative of the church,” he said.

Security of appointment

Most observers are panning proposed legislation to eliminate “security of appointment” – also known as “guaranteed appointment” – for ordained elders.

The Study of Ministry Commission said the practice is not financially sustainable and “limits the ability of the church to respond to the primacy of missional needs.” An earlier report estimated there are 784 more U.S. clergy than positions needed in the church.



Members of the Virginia General Conference delegation at the 2008 gathering in Fort Worth, Texas. File photo/Linda Rhodes

The commission has submitted legislation that would allow bishops and cabinets to give an elder in good standing a less than full-time appointment. The legislation also would permit bishops and their cabinets, with the approval of their Boards of Ordained Ministry and annual conference’s executive session, to put elders on unpaid transitional leave for up to 24 months.

Clergy on transitional leave would be able to participate in their conference health program through their own contributions.

Proposed changes to the ordination process would also streamline the ordination process and sharpen the focus on making disciples. The plan would eliminate the commissioning step, create an orientation to ministry and require conferences to have vocational discernment coordinators.

Guaranteed appointments were introduced in the 1956 *Book of Discipline* as a way to protect women who received the rights to become ordained at that General Conference.

(continued next page: “Preview”)

(“Preview” continued)

Other issues will be part of the workload ahead for the lawmaking body of the church, which meets April 24-May 4 at the Tampa Convention Center. Here are some of them:

“Set-aside” Bishop

Bishop Larry Goodpaster, current Council of Bishops president, discussed the proposal to create a “set-aside bishop,” one serving without residential responsibilities. “It is nearly impossible to be president of the Council of Bishops and lead an episcopal area,” he said.

The proposal is included in the restructuring legislation. Some question whether this new position would shift too much power to the bishops.

Ethnic Initiatives

Representatives of ethnic/racial ministries said they often feel “invisible.” The denomination’s ethnic initiatives help start new churches and cultivate new leaders to draw more people of color into The United Methodist Church. The group expressed concerns with a proposed restructure of the church. The ethnic initiatives said there was little or no consultation with them about the new structure proposed by the Interim Operations Team, which developed the restructure proposal endorsed by the Connectional Table and Council of Bishops.

Act of Repentance and Healing

An Act of Repentance and Healing for Indigenous Persons will be held April 27. “I have two identities. I am a Christian, and I am Native American,” said the Rev. Anita Phillips, executive director of the Native American Comprehensive Plan. “It is with fear and trembling that I say, ‘yes,’ repentance is possible, and it can be genuine and honest.”

Not far from the Tampa Convention Center, where the legislative assembly will meet, there is a marker in honor of the remains of a small Native American tribe uncovered when the center was constructed in 1987. “A temple mound stood five stories high and existed before the time of Christ,” said the Rev. Stephen Sidorak, top executive of the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns. “We have to repent of what we have done ... and what we have left undone,” Sidorak said.

Worldwide Nature of the Church

A Committee to Study the Worldwide Nature of the denomination considered how to forge deeper connections, establish greater local authority and create a more equitable sharing of power and representation, says Kansas Bishop Scott Jones, who chaired the committee. Central conferences outside the United States have the right to adapt the *Book of Discipline* for their own use, but “nobody knows what is adaptable and what isn’t,” Jones pointed out. The committee has submitted legislation to solve that problem.

Changes to Clergy Pensions

Delegates will consider two proposals that would change clergy pensions, shifting more of the risk in retirement preparation from annual conferences to individual clergy.

The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits is asking the denomination’s top lawmaking body to choose between the two options. The first would combine a defined benefit component with a defined contribution component, like the clergy’s current retirement program but with a reduced benefit for clergy and, consequently, a lower



The Rev. Ellen Elaine Stanovsky (current Denver area bishop) reads from the Book of Discipline on the floor of the 2008 General Conference. UMNS file photo

contribution for conferences. The second option would be a defined contribution-only plan.

A defined benefit plan provides a monthly pension payment for life, with the employer assuming the bulk of the investment risk. A defined contribution plan – like the 401(k) plans most corporate employees now have – provides an account balance to use during retirement, with the clergyperson assuming most of the risk that the money will not run out in his or her lifetime.

The pension board recommends the first option, which combines a reduced defined benefit component with a defined contribution component.

Either option would reduce the costs to conferences overall by about 15 percent. The proposed changes would not reduce benefits for retired clergy that already are being paid or reduce what active clergy have already earned.

Church Budget

The General Council on Finance and Administration’s main task will be to present the proposed budget for 2013-16. At \$603 million, the recommended budget reflects reductions of 6.6 percent and marks the first time a budget smaller than that for the previous quadrennium will be presented. □

-United Methodist News Service

Issues call for holy conferencing

By Bishop Joe E. Pennel Jr.

“Hot button” issues are not new to Methodism. Some are saying that, when the General Conference convenes, delegates will be dealing with issues that could “destroy The United Methodist Church.” These alarmist voices have been heard throughout our history, but the people called Methodists have found a way to remain engaged with one another.

John Wesley opposed the Revolutionary War while the Methodists in America supported it. There were deep divides between those who favored an educated clergy and those who supported a “called” preacher. In the 1820s and 1830s the issues were labor unions, peace organizations, Sabbath crusades, the formation of Bible societies and slavery. There was also the formation of the Methodist Protestant Church which was born out of disagreement over the power of bishops to appoint presiding elders.

The General Conference of 1844 met from May 1 until June 11. The slavery issue extended the length of the conference. The issue revolved around how the Methodists would respond to “the people of color” in the United States. The General Conference agreed that the gospel should be preached to African Americans, but the delegates were divided over whether to extend equal civil rights and privileges to “them.” As a result of these differences, the Methodists divided along geographical lines and were not reunited until 1939.

This deep geographical divide did not keep the Northern church from writing a social creed in 1908; the Southern branch followed suit in 1914. Such action indicates that Methodists have never feared taking a stand on controversial issues when moral principles were involved.

Our history tells us that we have found direction out of difficult situations when we have engaged one another while being open to the nudging of the Holy Spirit. This way of being church is what United Methodists call “conferencing.” Conferencing is our way of being engaged with spirituality, mission, governance and fraternity. It is a time when we, as United Methodists, come together for worship, prayer, Bible study and the conduct of our business in a grace-filled manner. We believe that truth emerges when we come together to listen to one another and to be open to the nudging of the Holy Spirit.

We will not tear down the walls that divide us if we neglect the power of holy conferencing. In 1744, Mr. Wesley called the first gathering of preachers. He guided the discussion by asking: “What [shall we] teach, how [shall we] teach and, what [shall we] do; that is how to regulate our doctrine, discipline and practice.” Putting those same questions to General Conference has the power to guide us into a future that advances the cause of Christ. □

—Former Virginia Bishop Joe Pennel is a professor of pastoral leadership at Vanderbilt Divinity School.

“I’ve come to believe that there are more conspiracy theories in The United Methodist Church about each other and different groups than there ever was about the assassination of John F. Kennedy and 9/11 put together. ... There are so many issues: Restructure the church, study of ministry, budget, non-residential bishop, streamlining the *Discipline*, homosexuality and more inclusive language, reproductive choice, immigration, divestment, environmental awareness ... Any one of these issues can make your mind explode, or spoil an otherwise wonderful dinner party, but we’re going to put them all together as the responsible people of the United Methodist Church.”

—Bishop Sally Dyck of Minnesota, chair of the Council of Bishops’ “Holy Conferencing” committee.



High expectations surround 2012 General Conference



Virginia delegate Marshall Bailey finds something to laugh about during 2008 General Conference. File photo/Linda Rhodes.

By Rich Peck

Every four years, United Methodists develop high expectations that delegates to the top legislative body of the denomination will set policies and pass resolutions that address specific challenges in the church and society.

Similar expectations surround the 988 delegates and 4,000 volunteers and observers who will attend the 2012 General Conference in Tampa.

United Methodists expect the assembly will take actions recognizing the denomination is a global church, and not a U.S. church with overseas outposts.

Others are confident that the 11-day event will result in a new structure that will increase the number of vital congregations and address the four areas of focus embraced by the 2008 General Conference: improving health globally, engaging in ministry with the poor, creating new places for new people and revitalizing existing congregations and developing principled Christian leaders for the church and the world.

Others anticipate a time when the denomination will address injustices against indigenous people and other social justice issues.

"Each General Conference has a major impact on the life of our denomination and our role in the world," said

the Rev. Gere Reist, secretary of General Conference. "When the delegates decide where to invest our money and our talent, they also decide who will live and who will

die, who will hear the Gospel and who will not, who will be welcomed into the life of the church and who will be turned aside. It is an awesome task and a high calling."

The theme of the 2012 gathering is "Make Disciples of Jesus Christ to Transform the World." Bishop Larry Goodpaster, president of the Council of Bishops, will likely address that theme during the opening worship celebration at 4 p.m. on April 24. United Methodists will be able to participate via live streaming at www.umc.org/gc2012.

On April 25, three addresses will provide a theological grounding for the delegates' work. The Council of Bishops elected Bishop Peter Weaver to prepare and deliver the Episcopal Address on behalf of 157 active and retired bishops from the U.S., Africa, Europe and Asia.

The Episcopal Address is one of the few times bishops address the assembly outside of worship. While they attend and preside over the plenary sessions, bishops have neither voice nor vote on legislation and do not address the General Conference without special permission.

The Laity Address will be delivered by Dr. Steve Furr, lay leader of the Alabama-West Florida Conference; Betty Spiwe Katiyo, a graduate of Old Mutare Mission in Zimbabwe; and Amory Peck, lay leader of the Pacific Northwest Conference. Presenting the Young People's Address will be Krin Ali and Joy Eva Algodon-Bohol. Ali, 18, is a high school senior and a member of Park Hill UMC in Denver. Algodon-Bohol, 24, lives in Manila, Philippines, and worships at Holy Grace UMC in Cainta, Rizal. A freelance journalist, she is president of the national United Methodist Youth Fellowship.

Annual conferences in the United States will send 606 delegates. Those in Africa, Asia and Europe will have 372 delegates (up 96 from 2008 and up 186 from 2004), including 282 from Africa. United Methodists in the Philippines elected 48 delegates, while those in Europe named 42. Ten delegates will come from "concordat" churches with which the denomination has a formal relationship.

The North Katanga Conference with 808,123 members is the largest in the denomination. It will send 52 delegates. The next largest delegations are from Côte d'Ivoire, 40; North Georgia and Virginia, 26 each; Florida and Western North Carolina, 22 each; and Texas, 20.

General Conference's main task is revising *The Book of*



Discipline. The denomination's law book regulates how local churches, annual conferences and general agencies are organized and sets policies regarding church membership, ordination, administration, property and judicial procedures. Each proposal for change originates with a petition sent to General Conference by individual church members, local congregations, annual conferences or general agencies. A majority vote in a plenary session makes most proposals church law. Constitutional amendments require a two-thirds vote by the delegates, followed by a two-thirds affirmative vote of the aggregate members voting in annual conference sessions.

At General Conference, each petition is assigned to one

of 13 legislative committees. The group of 70-80 delegates reviews all petitions relating to a specific part of the Discipline. The committee's recommendation on each goes to the full assembly for final action.

Delegates will also elect members of the Judicial Council and the University Senate and revise *The Book of Resolutions'* collection of statements on social justice issues. The statements are considered instructive and persuasive but are not binding on church members. □

-The Rev. Richard Peck is a retired clergy member of New York Conference. He has attended 11 General Conferences including four times as editor of the Daily Christian Advocate. This article was originally written for Interpreter magazine.

'Study of Ministry' member makes a simple suggestion on the 'adaptive challenge' and 'Call to Action' proposal

By Ken Carter

In reflecting on the "Call to Action" (CTA) and its impending journey through the next General Conference of The United Methodist Church, I have wrestled with its use of the "adaptive challenge" language of Ronald Heifetz.* I resonate with much of the CTA's documents, thus far, but I find the weakness to be here: not in the use of the language of adaptive challenge, but in the struggle to clarify the adaptive challenge itself. As I have written, the Interim Report is stronger in its offering of technical solutions (and largely ones that I also support) than adaptive ones.

So, a simple suggestion: what if the adaptive challenge, inspired by the "Call to Action," is that nothing happens at the district, annual conference or general church level that is not in partnership with some local church or small network of local churches? There are evidences of strong partnerships already (note the Ginghamburg United Methodist Church's mission work in the Sudan with the United Methodist Committee on Relief), but the idea would be that this becomes normative, and a key measure in how funds are allocated (and



perhaps matched).

This, it strikes me, is "giving the work back to the people." The General Conference speaks for the whole church. Bishops guard the faith of the whole church and seek her unity. All other work would be planned and executed with local churches as full partners in the equations. This would potentially create the following benefits: local churches would become more connectional; in an age of scarce resources, crucial and life-giving work would be sustained; the distances between boards and agencies and local churches would be lessened; and smaller boards and agencies could draw upon the gifts and talents of the laity who remain in their local contexts.

I am aware that on one level this is not a novel idea; this is the way we function now, at our best. I am suggesting that the flow of resources should be to the mission of God that happens as local churches use their own resources and those within the connection. Indeed the mission of God, in its United Methodist expression, calls for a strong and vital partnership between local churches, where disciples are formed, and institutions whose history and expertise are essential.

This simple suggestion will call for congregations to be more connectional (and thus healthier), and for boards and agencies (in whatever form they exist) to be more local. This will require us to change our behaviors and it will lead us to collaborate in sharing our strengths. All work done beyond the local church will be for the sake of the local church, but on the way to a larger purpose: the mission of God and the transformation of the world. □

-The Rev. Ken Carter is Waynesville District superintendent in the Western North Carolina Conference.

**Ronald Heifetz is founder of the Leadership Center at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard.*

Virginia

Bishop Pereira tells amazing story of church growth in Cuba

Even those in the audience who do not speak Spanish could grasp the meaning of a word Cuba's Bishop Ricardo Pereira kept using over and over: "corazón" ... "heart."

As in, you have to have a heart that burns with the desire to do the Lord's work. You have to have a heart for expanding the church. "Methodists are called to have that burning heart," said Pereira through translator Aldo Gonzalez. "We can't sit still. ... If your heart does not burn, no program is going to fix it."

Bishop Pereira's story of the exploding church growth in Communist-controlled Cuba inspired the attendees at the latest 5 Talent Academy teaching session held Feb. 23 at Ebenezer UMC in Stafford.

The event marked the sixth and final session of the first three-year cycle of the 5 Talent Academy, part of the "All Things New" Virginia Conference strategy that targets the vitality of existing congregations. At Annual Con-

ference in June, an invitation will go out to a new class of congregations to begin the 5 Talent Academy process.

As part of the 5 Talent Academy plan, existing churches are encouraged to help start new faith communities. Bishop Pereira and several church planters from the Florida Conference helped Virginia Conference clergy and laity envision what that might be like.

Mont Duncan, the Florida Conference director of Congregational Development, compared it to having a baby. "You go through a lot of pain and suffering, but then you are very proud of the result," Duncan said.

Pereira was elected a bishop of the Cuban Methodist Church in 1999. He also serves concurrently as senior pastor of the largest church in Cuba. He became a minister when Christianity in Cuba was at a low ebb. "No one wanted to be a pastor," he said. Pereira was threatened and beaten by the Communists, ordered to leave the country, but he persisted in trying to rebuild the church.

"In the 1970s we tried every program that came along, but the church continued to grow older and decline," Pereira said. "We had no other option but to pray and fast with all our power."

Some of his statistics were staggering: There



Bishop Pereira speaks at the 5 Talent Academy. At right, he joins Bishop Kammerer for 'The Great Thanksgiving.'

were 3,000 members in 1985; today there are more than 30,000. In 1999 there were 90 Methodist churches in Cuba; now there are 361. The church there has averaged 10 percent growth each year, but in the past quadrennium it has been more than 60 percent. When he was elected bishop there was a Methodist presence in less than half of the nation; now it's up to 90 percent, "and I know we can finish the last ten percent before I end my episcopacy!" he said to much applause.

Cuban pastors are encouraged to go out and speak to every member of their community. "And one DS required his pastors to get all their signatures to prove they had," he added. All clergy have started at least one new church. Incoming lay members must take a written exam on the basic tenets of the Methodist faith.

"What does it mean to be a Methodist?" Pereira asked with a smile. "Now we have a service where Cubans feel like they are Cuban and can move their bodies! ... My people come to church and after three hours we have to tell them to get out of there. Here (in America), if it's an hour and five minutes, people start to get upset."

Bishop Charlene Kammerer, who

Bishop Pereira, left, and former Cuban refugee Aldo Gonzalez formed a smooth team, with the bishop speaking in Spanish with passion and animation, and Gonzalez quickly giving the audience in Stafford the English translation. Photos/Neill Caldwell



has attended every session of the 5 Talent Academy, extended a welcome to the Cuban bishop in Spanish and had him officiate with her during Holy Communion.

Bishop Kammerer shared her faith journey with the audience, talking about how she and her two siblings were raised by her grandparents in central Florida because her father was away in the Army and her mother was diagnosed with a mental illness. Her grandmother was a “notorious” teacher in the local schools, a strict disciplinarian who “also offered unconditional love to all her students.”

Kammerer said she was the first member of her family to graduate from a four-year college. “When the chair of the Religion Department asked if I was interested in the ministry, I said ‘no.’ I had never met a woman preacher.” She went to Garrett Evangelical Seminary with husband, Leigh, but assumed that because of her gender she had to



follow the Christian Education track. When she realized she was called to ordained ministry, she finished her Masters in Christian Education and then re-enrolled to complete the Masters in Divinity as well.

“There was a sign in the church we worshipped in that read ‘The sign of God is that you will be led where you did not plan to go.’ ... God has given us new life, new friends and new purpose all along the way.” She said that Romans 8:28 – “in all things God works for the good of those who love him...” – has been her favorite Bible verse.

The next 5 Talent Academy will be Oct. 6, with the Rev. Dr. Alan Rice teaching on ministry with the poor. □

– Neill Caldwell



Q&A: *The process of setting goals for Vital Congregations has some scratching their heads. Here are some answers.*

By Larry Davies

Over the last few weeks, I have received a lot of good questions about setting Vital Congregations goals. Here are some of them, with answers.

What is definition of a small group? The Vital Congregations Web site <www.vitalcongregations.org> provides no real guidance. Any group should be counted that is considered helpful to the life of the church and involves church members. The important thing is consistency, so that a record is kept of which groups are counted from year to year.

What if previous numbers were inflated or under-reported?

These numbers cannot be corrected now, but for the future it is important that we continuously monitor the numbers for accuracy. Statistics are for comparison purposes, so it's important to start right with accurate 2012 numbers – even if they don't match up with previous years.

Apportionments contain administrative costs. Is this an accurate reflection of mission giving as compared to counting number of people involved in missions?

It is the combination of dollars spent and people involved that really shows how a church is becoming mission oriented. The numbers are intended for comparison to measure improvement over the years.

Where do I enter my church's "Smart Actions" on the web?

Smart Actions are not entered on the Web site. They are activities and strategies that help congregations reach the five goals of a Vital Congregation and are part of the process laid out in the online Planning Guide. When your church has completed formulating these “Smart Actions,” they should be sent to the District Superintendent via e-mail.

How long will Vital Congregations program last?

Vital Congregations is intended to be a long-term commitment rather than a short-term program. There may be adjustments made, but the major focus of Vital Congregations is in long-term growth.

What is the relationship of Vital Congregations to “All Things New”?

We are blessed in Virginia. “All Things New” and its programs like the 5 Talent Academy already provide resources churches will need to fulfill the goals given in Vital Congregations.

Should goals be entered on the Web site or delivered (e-mailed) to the DS? All goals are entered directly on the Vital Congregations Web site. Each district has a special log-in to check these goals and lock them in, all within the Web site. Each district is also asked to provide stories of how churches plan to achieve their goals. These stories or action plans can be posted directly on to www.vitalcongregations.org. □

–The Rev. Larry Davies is superintendent of the Lynchburg District.

Large crowd hears national leader talk about 'crunch time' for the black church



The Rev. Dr. Fred Allen talks about the need to make 'Open Doors' a reality and not just an advertising slogan.

A full house of 85 participants representing congregations from across the Commonwealth filled the largest meeting space at the United Methodist Center in Glen Allen Feb. 18 to hear the national leader of the initiative for black churches talk about “crunch time” for making new disciples and moving the church forward.

Dr. Fred Allen, president of the denomination's Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century (SBC21), said this is a “critical time” for churches across the connection. But Allen also had a message of hope. “God, who can take nothing and created masses, is transforming and multiplying.”

SBC21 is a program designed to assist United Methodist churches with predominantly black congregations become more fruitful in mission and ministry.

After the Rev. Lyle Morton of Woodlawn UMC, Alexandria District, motivated the crowd with a powerful sermon, Dr. Allen praised Virginia

Conference pastors like Clarence Brown and Sherry Daniels as being “among the men and women who take a prophetic stance.” And he was encouraged by the number of “inspirational” young persons in the audience, asking them all to come to the front and introduce themselves.

He said that young blacks are stereotyped by their dress, their music, and their tattoos. “Every young man and woman cannot be devalued,” he said. “They need to be loved; they need to be brought into our churches.”

Allen stressed evangelism to the unchurched, saying that we need all kinds of people in our churches, “even the people in our communities that we don't necessarily want to be in our church. ... We need to follow our slogan ‘Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.’ not in some rhetorical way, but for real!”

Dr. Allen also reminded the participants of the 1.3 million black men in the nation's prison system and

The Rev. Lyle Morton of Woodlawn UMC gets participants revved up with his powerful sermon.



called that “one of our greatest opportunities for ministry.”

Allen also told participants “the black church is God's gift to the larger church.”

During small group discussion several people reported that they didn't feel the conference was providing much support to the predominantly black churches. But layperson Norma Turner, a member at Roberts Memorial UMC in the Alexandria District, reminded the participants of the importance of paying their apportionments so that training events like this one could be provided. □

—Neill Caldwell



Participants at the Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century gathering talked in small groups to respond to several questions posed by Dr. Allen. Photos/Neill Caldwell



Bishop dedicates new solar panels on roof of United Methodist Center

Virginia Conference staff and guests gathered Feb. 15 to dedicate the new solar panels recently installed on the roof of the United Methodist Center on Staples Mill Road in Glen Allen.

Bishop Charlene Kammerer offered a short prayer of dedication, asking God to bless “this source of new light for our conference center. ... Help us be the light of Christ to all your children here and everywhere.”

The solar panels were installed as part of the Virginia Conference’s continuing effort to be “green” and to be a role model encouraging local churches to participate in the Virginia Conference’s “Green Church Initiative,” a program of the conference-sponsored “Caring for God’s Creation” ministry.

The 10 kilowatt system cost \$60,000 and was installed by Johnson Controls, a global company providing equipment, controls and services for heating, ventilating, air-conditioning, refrigeration and security systems.

Each year the 10 kilowatt system is expected to provide in excess of 12,000 kilowatt hours (kWh) of utility grade electric power directly to the facility. Based on the center’s 2009 consumption of 680,000 kWh, the solar panels should supplement about 2 percent of the building’s total requirements.

Future plans include conducting

an energy audit to identify additional opportunities to reduce use of energy so that the building will operate closer to the regional average of 16 kWh/square foot per year. Once that is accomplished, the percentage of solar contribution to the building’s total energy requirements will increase.

The center expects to save \$1,200 in electrical bills the first year. If energy costs increase at 5 percent a year, savings will compound to about \$2,000 per year in 10 years and \$3,500 per year in 20 years. Under that scenario, the panels will pay for themselves in 24 years.

A monitor in the building’s lobby shows how much energy the solar panels are generating in real time.

The conference headquarters formed a “Green Team” in 2010 in response to the United Methodist Council of Bishops’ call for more efficient energy use in all denominational offices. The center has also started extensive recycling and composting programs.

“Every time I come into the building now I find myself looking up,” said Bishop Kammerer, “and it makes me feel good to know that we’re doing our part in caring for God’s Creation.” □

—Linda Rhodes and Neill Caldwell,
Virginia United Methodist
Communications

Several newcomers join Virginia Conference staff

Visitors to the United Methodist Center in Glen Allen will see several new faces when they come for business or meetings.

Cathryn Wooton is the new graphic designer in Communications. She has 25 years of graphic design and art direction experience, including owning her own design studio, where her clients included Christian Youth Theater of Richmond, United Methodist Publishing House and Discovery UMC. Prior to that, she worked for Hallmark. Wooton is a member of Shady Grove UMC in Short Pump.

Shirley Huffman has filled an accounting position in the Treasurer’s office. She comes to the conference office from Woodlake UMC, where she has been treasurer for the past five years, and has served on the conference Council for Finance and Administration.

Dave Thompson will join the Virginia United Methodist Foundation in the area of planned giving and endowments. Thompson is a retired trust and investment officer with Bank of America and its predecessors, and the Trust Company of Virginia. He serves as co-chair of the endowment committee at Brandermill UMC and is in the process of becoming a certified lay speaker.

While Virginia United Methodist Pensions, Inc., (VUMPI) is not adding or subtracting personnel, the office is restructuring the duties of its staff members, executive director Don Rogers announced. **Trish Hutchinson**, accounting manager, will reduce her hours to three days per week and will handle bookkeeping and accounting. Benefits Administrator **Nancy Blair** will assume responsibility for the pension and welfare plans, and Billing and Health Plan Administrator **Judy Astrella** will add responsibilities for administration of VUMPI’s health plans. □

Asking questions at summer camps

Camps and retreats are a hotbed of spiritual growth and experiential learning.

At camp, children and youth find a community different from what they often experience in the “real world.” They find a place where they are valued just as they are, as children of God. They find a place where they can form new relationships, with peers and “grown-ups,” a place where they carry away experiences of self-efficacy, which empowers them to handle problems and situations on their own.

At camp children and youths encounter learning as it happens, through group decision-making, playing games, preparing and sharing meals, worship around a campfire, self-reflection, studying nature and so much more. At summer camp and retreats, we’re building better people – better people for the glory of God!

Camp employees not only teach children and youths about loving God, others and themselves, but we’re also teaching them how to be Christian leaders. Some Christian educators may even suggest that the best way to help others develop as Christian leaders is not by having all the right answers but rather by asking the right questions. After all, how does one learn to ponder and discern more deeply?

At camp, children, youths and adults are thrust into an environment where not only are questions expected – they are encouraged. Asking and responding to questions is a central strength of Christian camping and experiential learning. It invites individuals to go beyond the superficial or expected.

In addition, participants, volunteers, staff and clergy are often moved to “ask” the big questions of themselves while on, or leading, a retreat. Questions about our spiritual direction, God’s call, our motives, our desires are often called to center stage when we take the time out of “normal” life.

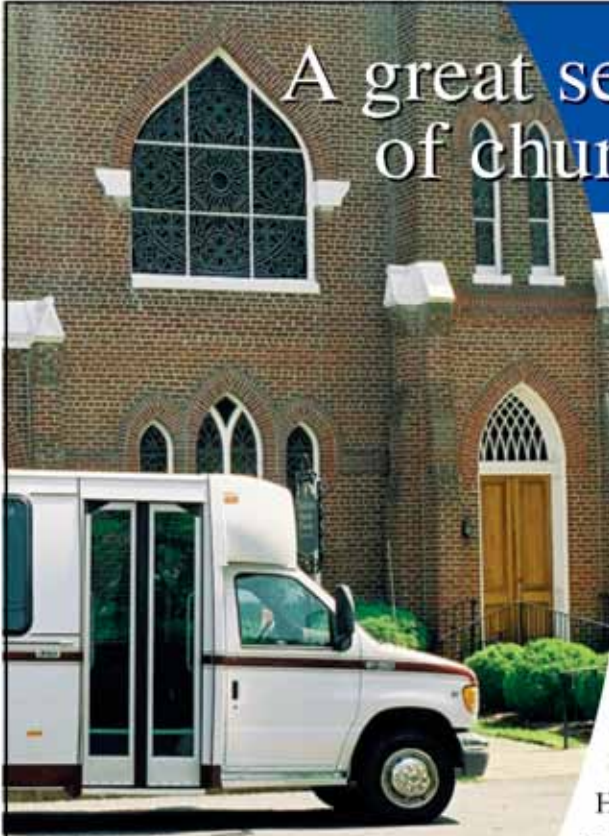
If the “Art of Asking Questions” is a spiritual practice, I invite you to sign up your child for summer camp at Westview on the James, the United Methodist camp in Goochland. Join a traditional resident program (7-14-year olds) or Adventure Camp (13-17-year olds). Your children and youths will return with more questions – and answers, too!

For more information about Westview, visit www.westviewonthejames.org, call (804) 457-4210, or e-mail 1231westview@hughes.net. □

-Cat Holbert is assistant director at Camp Westview on the James



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Shenandoah students form relationships during work trip

One year ago in April, a series of tornadoes ripped through the state of Alabama, destroying everything in their path. Volunteers quickly began to pour in to the area, and Shenandoah University students began to plan when they could show compassion and love to those who were suffering and left without across that region.

In January, 16 students and staff left Winchester en route to Alabama. For eight days the team worked in the tornado-damaged area, demolishing, rebuilding and organizing.

When we arrived, we began to work closely with Habitat for Humanity, which houses the North Alabama Conference Disaster Recovery Center.

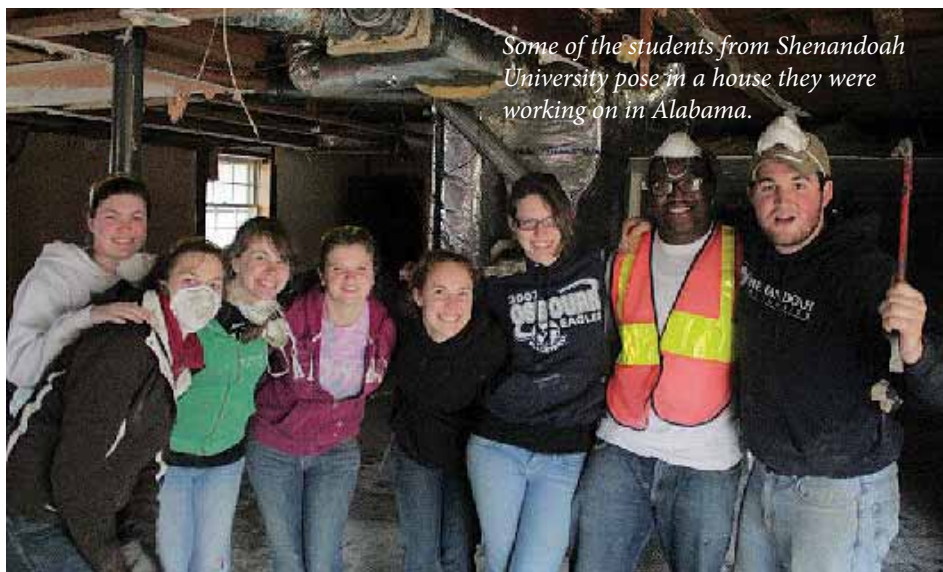
Much of our time was spent demolishing houses and building them back up. We also had the opportunity to organize the disaster warehouse for the North Alabama Conference. But some of the most memorable events had nothing to do with rebuilding or organizing. Many students cherished sacred moments just being with the families that were affected by the storms and building relationships based on the love of Christ.

One student said "I was scraping caulk out of a tub, and it did not want to come out. Just when I became frustrated, the mother walked in with her infant and said to the child, 'Now we don't have to freeze when we take a bath.' I knew in that moment why I was doing this task that seemed so mundane at the time." The family's bathtub was not properly installed, which resulted in a gaping hole allowing cold air to flow into the bathroom. Students scraped away the old caulk to properly repair and seal the hole.

Students realized that while there were times for them to accomplish huge tasks, there were also times when the small things were really what were needed at the time. Regardless of the task, if it seemed small or big, it was important and needed.

Sometimes we are called to organize, called to use a sledgehammer and demolish a wall, and sometimes we are called to love our neighbor. Let us never forget to serve as the Spirit leads, while we embody Christ daily acting out of compassion and love for our neighbors. □

—Amy Howard is Spiritual Life coordinator at Shenandoah University.



Some of the students from Shenandoah University pose in a house they were working on in Alabama.

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Can become a very special home

for retired United Methodist pastors and their spouses in the years to come.

The **Retired Clergy Housing Corporation** of the Virginia Conference maintains a program to provide retirement homes for eligible United Methodist pastors who need them.

This program has been made possible by the gift of homes willed to the Corporation for this purpose. Other contributions come through the Covenant of Gratitude whose members contribute \$1.00 a year for each person ordained a commissioned probationer at the Virginia Annual Conference.

If you would like to consider willing your home to the Retired Clergy Housing Corporation of the Virginia Conference or if you would like to share through the Covenant of Gratitude, please mail in the coupon below with your name and address.



c/o Tom Coffman, President
4837 Village Lake Dr.,
Richmond, VA 23234

Retired Clergy Housing Corp.

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Nation & World

United Methodists to 'Change the World' in May

Fifteen countries. 250,000 volunteers. 3 million lives positively influenced in 2011. United Methodists are gearing up for the third annual "Change the World" event on May 19-20, to build community locally and fight malaria globally.

New research from United Methodist Communications reveals that churches that provide opportunities to help their communities are viewed much more favorably because of their active, "outside the church" approach.

"Change the World" is a movement to connect United Methodists by building community locally in service projects and fighting malaria globally with "Imagine No Malaria" to end preventable deaths from malaria in Africa. Local service projects vary and include raising funds for worthy causes, feeding the hungry, planting gardens, advocating for peace and justice and more.

"Vital congregations are engaged in mission, and "Change the World" illustrates the power of our interconnectedness," said the Rev. Larry

Hollon of United Methodist Communications. "Last year, more than 2,000 events took place in 15 countries. "Change the World" presents an opportunity to transform lives in connection with others."

United Methodist Communications has created several "Change the World" resources to help churches with project ideas, information on how to advertise free events, and a sermon series. Register your event by April 16 to receive a free marketing kit that includes a lawn banner, sermon series DVD, and t-shirt.

To locate an event, go to <http://rethinkchurch.org/get-involved>. Join the conversation online on Facebook,

or on Twitter using the hashtags **#CTW2012** and **#rethinkchurch**.

"Change the World" was created as part of an effort to Rethink Church by utilizing outreach events to make a positive difference in the world beyond the church doors. The event is based on a concept by the Rev. Mike Slaughter, author of *Change the World: Recovering the Message and Mission of Jesus*. Other partners include United Methodist Publishing House, General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men, General Board of Discipleship, and General Board of Church and Society. □

—Diane Degan,
United Methodist Communications

CHANGE THE WORLD

United Methodists in the Richmond District got out beyond their church walls to help the community last year. File photos



United Methodist churches hit in latest round of tornadoes

Tornadoes roared across several Southern and Midwestern states on Feb. 28-29 and March 3, leaving death and destruction in their wake.

But even as United Methodists grieved loss of life and assessed damage, they sought ways to be Christ in their communities.

In Harrisburg, in southeastern Illinois, six people were confirmed dead, and many were missing. The undamaged First United Methodist Church became a hub for disaster relief. Mayor Eric Gregg said, "The loss of life breaks my heart. The outreach is heartfelt and appreciated. Many of our people went to Joplin to help, and today we are the ones who find ourselves in need."

In Kansas, a tornado flattened Harveyville UMC southwest of




The United Methodist Church in West Liberty, Ky., was destroyed. National Guard photo

Topeka. Three deaths were reported in southwestern Missouri. A tornado moved through Branson, heavily damaging the city's theaters and sucking furniture from hotel rooms. Parts of Indiana, Alabama and Kentucky also sustained major damage.

The best immediate way to assist

those affected by the recent tornadoes is by donating to UMCOR's fund for U.S. Disaster Response, Advance No. 901670. Contributors can write "Tornadoes 2012." on their checks. UMCOR also is asking for cleaning buckets. □

—United Methodist Communications




At 13, my dream of a loving family came true. **Shouldn't my dream of going to college?**

Being adopted or in foster care shouldn't mean giving up on the dream of a higher education. At UMFS, we are committed to helping teens achieve their dreams.

Donate to the Pop Smith Scholarship Fund at UMFS.

Pop Smith Scholarship Fund, UMFS
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Richmond, VA 23230
or online at www.umfs.org
Gifts to this fund are tax-deductible.



Old Mutare Hospital needs water

by Julie Warren

Most families in Zimbabwe, including little Hope's family, do not live in urban areas with easy access to health care. Two weeks before Hope was due to be born, her mother travelled to the Waiting Women's Shelter, a condemned building at Old Mutare Hospital, to ensure her daughter would be delivered safely in a hospital.

But the Waiting Women's Shelter has no running water or bathrooms, and there is a constant battle against rodents. Expectant mothers must cook their meals in an outdoor kitchen and fetch water from one of two wells on the hospital grounds. When it was time for Hope's mother to deliver, she did not have the luxury of a hospital with fresh running water. Instead, the nursing staff relied on a bucketful of water and an UMCOR birthing kit during the delivery.



Accessing safe water is a challenge at Old Mutare Hospital. The 70-bed health-care facility lacks both clean running water and a properly working sewage system. Yet, the hospital plays a critical role. Nestled in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe, it supports six rural clinics and serves more than 11,000 people. Each day, Dr. Tendai Manyeza, a United Methodist missionary and the medical director of the hospital, faces the challenge of providing the best care he can for families like Hope's.

Imagine if you or a loved one were delivering a baby or recovering from an infectious disease in a facility such as this. What would be your prayer?

You can be the answer to the

prayer of the thousands of people who rely on Old Mutare Hospital.

Help UMCOR bring the facility clean running water and repair its broken sewage system. Give to Global Water and Sanitation, UMCOR Advance #3020600.

Zimbabwe is still facing emergency humanitarian challenges in the form of diseases like cholera, food shortage and limited access to basic services. In 2009, Zimbabwe experi-

enced an acute cholera outbreak with more than 100,000 cases and about 4,000 deaths recorded. The underlying causes are related to the lack of safe drinking water and inadequate sanitation, resulting in poor hygiene practices. Access to safe water supply and basic sanitation in Zimbabwe has eroded significantly over the last few years. □

—Julie Warren is UMVIM Coordinator for the Virginia Conference.



Expectant mothers wait outside of Old Mutare Hospital in Zimbabwe. Photo: Kathy Kraiza/UMCOR

Smokeless tobacco pinched:

Major League Baseball's new contract a 'historic first step' toward total ban

The 2012 Major League Baseball season, which starts in April, will look a little different than in years past.

During the off-season agreement reached last month between Major League Baseball and its Players' Association, players will no longer take the field with a tin tobacco can or package in their back pockets. Players also have agreed not to use tobacco during TV interviews and at other events when they are around fans.

The smokeless tobacco agreement was included in the new players' contract following a recent intensive nationwide campaign by a national coalition of more than 200 public health groups, baseball figures, faith leaders, young ball players and leagues, and thousands of individuals who took action by signing a petition to ban smokeless tobacco. The "Knock Tobacco Out of the Park" effort was also supported by The United Methodist Church.

Faith United Against Tobacco and the *Campaign for Tobacco-free Kids* hailed the new contract as a "historic first step" toward getting smokeless tobacco out of the game.

This is significant progress toward protecting the health of big-league players and millions of young fans who look up to them, said Matthew Myers, president of *Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids*. "We would have preferred that tobacco use be completely prohibited at games and on camera. Still, this is significant progress. This forward step marks the first time ever that the league and the players have recognized that it is time to break this unhealthy connection." □

—Wayne Rhodes, General Board of Church & Society



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An Event for Older Adults

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Epworth By The Sea
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Enjoy a guided tour and learn the history of 8 historic churches of various denominations and sizes in coastal Georgia. Make a visit to the smallest church in America. Enjoy a hymn sing!



For more information, call 912-638-8688 or www.epworthbythesea.org.

Did faith drive Titanic musicians?

Since 1955, April 15 has signified Tax Day in the United States – a pretty tragic date in our minds. But prior to that, April 15 always marked an even larger tragedy: the sinking of the RMS Titanic.

This month marks the 100th anniversary of the famous shipwreck that claimed almost 1,500 lives, and as the centennial draws nearer, interest in the event is ramping up.

Of note to United Methodists is the fact that two of the members of the famed Titanic band were Methodists themselves.

A recently released book by music journalist Steve Turner detailing the lives of the band members cites the Methodist heritage of band leader and violinist Wallace Hartley and cellist John Wesley Woodward, and speculates how their faith influenced their decision to play till the last.

In “The Band That Played On,” Turner wrote: “[Hartley’s] moral character and his personal assurance that death was not the end must have stirred his bandsmen. Together as a band under Hartley’s leadership, they transcended their personal limitations.”

Wallace Hartley was raised in Colne, England. His father, Albion Hartley, was choirmaster and Sunday school superintendent at Bethel Independent Methodist Chapel. Perhaps a foreshadowing of things to come, it was choirmaster Hartley who introduced the hymn “Nearer, My God, to Thee” to the congregation.

Colne had deep ties to Methodism, although its introduction to the movement wasn’t the best first impression. Several times John Wesley visited the mill town, which had a tough reputation, and was always met with opposition and, in some cases, violence. During one visit, he was met by an angry mob, and one of his helpers was thrown to his death off a bridge.

However, Methodism was eventually embraced in Colne, and almost 10 Methodist chapels sprang up there.

Born in 1878, young Wallace studied at Colne’s Methodist day school, sang in Bethel’s choir and learned violin from a congregation member.

Less is known about the band member with the most “Methodist” name – John Wesley Woodward – but the

cellist was raised in the Methodist tradition, and his father was an officer at Hill Top Methodist Chapel in West Bromwich, England.

The Titanic sailed from Southampton, England, but its

band was hired in Liverpool, making them, behind The Beatles, maybe the second-most famous band to emerge from that port city.

Hartley was among three of eight Titanic musicians who were engaged to marry in the summer of 1912. Sadly, like many of his band mates, Hartley’s intent was to make this his last sea voyage and return home to concert work instead.

When the ship struck the iceberg around 11:40 p.m. on April 14, the band would have already finished playing for the night. Yet, something led them to gather up their instruments and head to the first-class lounge. One survivor later claimed that, as she passed the men, one of them told her they were “just going to give them a tune to cheer

things up a bit.”

“No one knows for sure why the band played,” Turner said. “We do know that Wallace Hartley once told a friend about the power of music to prevent panic. My feeling is that he was a person of great moral authority as well as a born leader, and therefore his wish at that time was passed on to all the men.”

Hartley’s was one of only three musicians’ bodies to be recovered and identified, and the only one returned to his home.

He was given a hero’s welcome as his funeral procession drew a crowd of 40,000 – almost twice Colne’s population at the time – and several memorials were crafted in his and the band’s honor. □

-Joey Butler for United Methodist Communications



Upcoming Events

APRIL

'ReFirement: A Creative Spark' for Older Adults

April 20-21, Blackstone Conference and Retreat Center. Sponsored by the conference Older Adult Council, this retreat will focus on fostering the spark of creativity in order to enrich the lives of older adults and enhance the ministries of the church. Workshops include watercolor and acrylic painting, music, liturgical movement and knitting/crocheting for making prayer shawls. Contact the Center for Lay Leadership Excellence, (804) 521-1153 or 1-800-768-6040, ext. 153, or <marthastokes@vaumc.org>.

School of Children's Ministries

April 20-21, Blackstone Conference and Retreat Center. This event will offer workshops such as: "Worship Together," "Curriculum Conundrum," "Buzz Words," "Think Fast!" and "Five Cultural Threats to Your Kids' Faith." You will be able to select three of six workshops. Cost will be \$70 per person (double) or \$90 per person (single) and will cover lodging, meals and resources. You can register online at <www.vaumc.org>, or e-mail Becky Tate at <beckytate@vaumc.org>.

MAY

A Sojourn to Sacredness

May 21-25, Eastern Shore. A theological and ecological pilgrimage for young adults sponsored by the conference Ministries with Young People and Caretakers of God's Creation. The deadline to register is May 11. Participants must be between 18-35 years old. For information, contact the Rev. Pat Watkins at <caretakersofcreation@me.com>.

JULY

Camp Rainbow Connection

July 8-13 and Aug. 12-17, Blackstone Conference and Retreat Center. Potential campers must be at least 16 years of age, have an intellectual disability as their primary disability, and be able to independently complete activities of daily living. Contact the Office of Leadership and Inclusivity to receive an application packet. New and returning staff volunteers are also needed. Staff members must be at least 16 years of age by July 1, agree to a criminal background check, attend a training session in the spring and commit to attending the full week of camp. For the first time in 2012,

there will be the opportunity for a limited number of 15-year-olds to serve as Camp Rainbow Connection Youth Advocates. Applications for staff and Youth Advocates are available on the Conference website, <www.vaumc.org>. Select "Ministries," followed by "Disabilities," then "Camp Rainbow Connection." For more information, contact the Office of Leadership and Inclusivity by calling 1-800-768-6040 or (804) 521-1100, ext. 153; or by e-mail at <marthastokes@vaumc.org>.

Camp Loud and Clear

July 13-15, Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center in Appomattox County. This is the second year for the camp which is specifically designed to meet the needs of children who are deaf and hard of hearing regardless of their degree of hearing loss or their chosen communication mode. Counselors at the camp will have experience working with children with hearing loss. There will be nationally certified interpreters present for the children who are deaf. Camp Loud and Clear is being supported by the Virginia Conference Commission on Disabilities, Longwood University, Radford University and the Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center. For additional information, contact Dr. Lissa Power-deFur at <powerdefurea@longwood.edu> or (434) 395-2972; Jennifer Kingsley at <jkkingsley@hotmail.com> or (434) 391-3679. A flyer and camper application can be found on the Virginia Conference website at: <www.vaumc.org/loudandclear>.

AUGUST

All God's Children Camp

Aug. 5-10, Camp Highroad in Middleburg; Aug. 5-10, Occohannock on the Bay in Belle Haven, Eastern Shore; and Aug. 12-17 at Westview on the James in Goochland. Children ages 7-12 who have an incarcerated mother or father spend a week at camp participating in activities such as boating, swimming, hiking, archery, music, crafts, Bible study and conflict resolution. Contact Casey Torrence at <caseytorrence@vaumc.org>.

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For \$20 a year, you can purchase a printed copy of the monthly magazine plus have full online access.

For those who just want to read the publication on the Internet you can purchase an "online only" subscription for \$10/year.

The "print only" subscription will remain just \$15/year.

For more information or to subscribe by phone with your credit card, call the Advocate office at 1-800-768-6040, or (804) 521-1100, ext. 110.





Local Church



▲ At **Appomattox UMC**, Farmville District, 100 walnut-stained wooden crosses were consecrated by The Rev. Russell Cheatham and given one to each family on as a prelude to the Lenten season. Each cross (pictured) measures 5 x 7 inches accompanied with white and purple stoles, wreath of thorns, a spear, a nail and a stone symbolizing the empty tomb. Pastor Russell suggested that the cross be located in special place in the home as the focal point for family devotions during Lent and beyond. Church United Methodist Women and United Methodist Men worked several months on this project.



▲ The “Top of the Hill Gang” at **Herndon UMC**, Arlington District, meets monthly for a brown bag lunch, devotion and discussion of current events.



▲ The Busy Bees Sunday School Class at **Mount Pisgah UMC** in Mount Sidney, Harrisonburg District, proved that children understand the concept of compassion when given an opportunity to respond to the needs of others. The children learned the importance of giving and sharing the love of Jesus by handing out candy canes and toys to the children and families that visited the Verona Community Food Pantry during the Christmas season, and continued to learn to identify with the needs of others in February by raising \$2,590 and 331 pounds of food for the Food Pantry through their participation in the “Souper Bowl of Caring.” After presenting their donation, they worked alongside their fellow church members to stock shelves and assist visitors to the pantry.

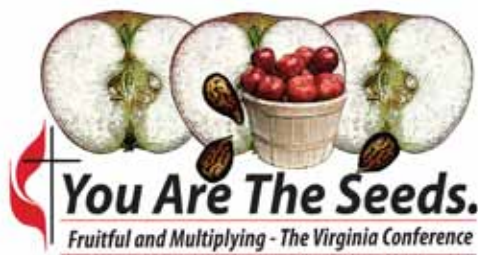


▲ At **Trinity UMC**, Danville District, Mary Moorefield and volunteers cutting labels for Henry Fork Service Center. They need 92,000 more for a new van. If you would like to help there are Bonus Coupons forms available to print off on the Henry Fork Service Center website.

Historic Calloway UMC Cemetery in Arlington in need of repairs

In Arlington, a United Methodist Church cemetery (pictured below) is on track to become one of two historic, black burial grounds in the county. But the condition of the property is at risk. Each day, the Rev. Sonja Oliver learns more about the humble cemetery. “Who you are is only as good as people’s memories are,” Oliver said. Bordering a busy highway, the 125 year-old **Calloway UMC Cemetery** is the final resting place to 100 African Americans – half in unmarked graves. “We all need to remember who we are and not just who we are now but who we have been,” Oliver said. Through research, the church found three former slaves in the cemetery. Oliver also noticed a detail in her papers – information helping her find, for the first time, the grave of a black Union soldier, Hesakiah Dorsey. But the soil is eroding and trash litters the graves. “I think it’s really important that that history doesn’t get lost,” said Cynthia Liccese-Torres, an Arlington Historic Preservation Planner. County historians are working with the church to protect the grounds with an historical marker. “It’s just an amazing piece of history that will now never go unnoticed,” she said after The Arlington county planning commission voted to make the cemetery a “historic” site.





BISHOP ANNOUNCES PREACHERS

— Bishop Charlene Kammerer, in her last Annual Conference before retirement as an active bishop, will preach at the closing service of worship on Sunday, June 24, which includes the fixing of 2012-2013 appointments. The 230th session of Annual Conference will be held June 22-24 at the Roanoke Civic Center. The bishop also has announced other preachers for 2012 Annual Conference, all of them Virginia Conference members. The Rev. Steve Hundley, superintendent of the Roanoke District, will preach at the Memorial Service. The Rev. David McAllister-Wilson, president of Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., will preach at the Service of the Ordering of Ministry. And at the Retirement Service, the preacher will be Dr. Youtha Hardman-Cromwell, also serving at Wesley Seminary as an assistant dean.

2012 Annual Conference Information

June 22-24, Roanoke Civic Center

For updates, visit <www.vaumc.org>

KITS FOR CONFERENCE

The 2012 Virginia Conference kit collection is being conducted to replenish the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) supply. UMCOR's Sager Brown Depot reports there is a need for all types of kits. Local churches are encouraged to collect items for any of the following most requested UMCOR kits and bring them to Annual Conference in Roanoke for delivery:

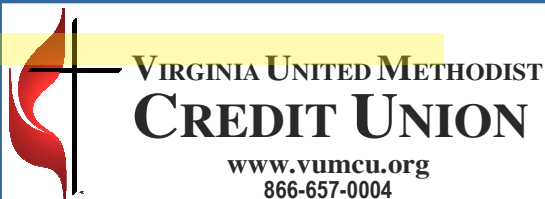
SCHOOL KIT

- 1 pair blunt scissors rounded tip only; no plastic scissors
- 3 units of paper 8½ x 11 spiral notebooks or top-bound pads; 150 sheets of loose-leaf can be as 1 unit combinations of spiral; top-bound or loose-leaf is acceptable, not composition books
- 1 hand-held pencil sharpener; must be at least one inch long and removed from packaging
- 1 30-centimeter ruler, hard or flexible; cartoon characters are acceptable but not advertisements

- 6 unsharpened pencils; no advertisements, religious, patriotic, military or camouflage symbols; cartoon characters are acceptable
- 2 half-inch erasers with no advertisements, religious, patriotic, military or camouflage symbols; cartoon characters are acceptable
- 24-count box of crayons
- 14"x16" cloth bag; homemade or purchased bags are acceptable; heavy-duty fabric only; denim, corduroy, drapery fabric etc; no advertisements, religious, patriotic, military or camouflage symbols; closures are optional, but must be buttons, snaps or Velcro-sewn in middle of opening if used

Assembly: Place all loose items on top of paper. Turn items sideways and slide into the cloth bag. Fold over the top of the bag so loose items do not fall out. Note: A pattern for the bag can be found at <www.umcor.org>. Go to "How To Give" at the top of the page and scroll

(Continued on Page 29)



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Living the Word



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

The Rev. Darcey G. Johnson currently serves Memorial United Methodist Church in Charles City. She lives in Richmond with her husband, the Rev. Drew Johnson, two daughters, Hannah Lee and Grace, a dog named Daisy and a cat named Alley.

April 8, 2012

Tough as Nails

John 20:1-10; 19-20

The time-table for our gospel reading spans about 12 hours. Twelve hours from Mary's post-resurrection identification to Jesus making a dramatic appearance with the barricaded disciples. Twelve hours was ample time for the disciples to vacillate between belief and shock.

Disoriented by the possibilities of God (resurrection) and the potential of the world (arrest) – they did what many of us do when overwhelmed, they got in a safe place and locked the doors.

But the resurrected Christ was not about to allow a double bolt to separate him from his followers. Jesus walked right through the locked doors to stand among the disciples and speak his first words, “peace be with you.” His first words to his followers who had broken their promise to follow him was a peace based upon a promise fulfilled.

You see, back in John Chapter 14, Jesus had told them that he would be leaving but then he said “my peace I give to you my peace I leave with you I do not give to you as the world gives... do not be afraid.” With Jesus standing among them with wounded hands and feet they began to understand what a peace not of this world really means. The peace that Jesus offered them and the peace that Jesus offers us now is a peace that has looked death, fear, sin and even hell right in the eyes and still overcomes.

As a dear friend reminded me: “Jesus went to the grave and back to bring us this peace.”

Therefore it is not a cheap peace or a flippant promise. It is a peace bought with his blood and sealed with his suffering. It is not merely a warm

and fuzzy peace, it is a tough as nails, not letting any locked door keep it out kind of peace. It is a peace that can find you regardless of what lock you have double bolted on your heart or mind's door.

And I can bear witness to this. I have heard how Jesus has found people in the most unlikely places and offered them a durable peace. Jesus has shown up in hospital rooms and in board rooms. Jesus has awakened people in the middle of the night and found them at high noon. Jesus has shown up on the mountaintops of gratitude and in the deepest valleys of despair. Jesus has found them when the news is tragic or the diagnosis grim. The situation may not change, but there is a shift, however significant or small, from fear to faith; from Good Friday to Easter Sunday.

Thanks be to God for a Savior no locks can exclude and for His peace, which is tough as nails. □

April 15, 2012

What Makes God Mad?

John 2:13-22

At seminary I had the privilege of having Archbishop Desmond Tutu as my guest professor for one semester. Archbishop Tutu is the Anglican priest from South Africa whom God used to help end apartheid and bring a measure of healing and forgiveness to his nation. What struck me most about Bishop Tutu was his countenance. Here is a man who literally radiated the joy of Christ. He is a man who witnessed atrocities and injustices, and yet the love of God poured from his words and his often utilized hand gestures.

I was surprised then to see a documentary about apartheid where Archbishop Tutu was pictured. It was shortly after a group of black South



Archbishop Tutu

Africans had retaliated against some of the perpetrators of apartheid. He stood and spoke to a crowd urging them to non-

violence, but he was genuinely and emphatically mad. It was a contrast to see this man of grace and love allowing his blood to boil, his voice to raise, and his finger to wag. Isn't anger a sin, I thought?

I realized that if you are going to get angry, best to get angry about what makes God mad. Tutu's anger came from the waste of human life, the injustice of racism, the senseless violence that tore bodies and families apart. In this passage from John's gospel Chapter 2 we see Jesus get angry. As he walks into the Temple courts he sees people profiting from and even preventing the worship of God.

Jesus is not merely frustrated, he is livid. This is no temper tantrum or juvenile outburst. The anger and its actions show us God's intolerance for anything that prohibits access to God.

All too often when we get angry, it is about us. If someone cuts us off while driving, we are offended. If someone fails to give us the kudos we feel we deserve, we get angry. If we do not receive what we ordered precisely when we want it, we get mad. The anger Jesus experienced was not due to a bruised ego, but rather because of actions that excluded people from worshipping God.

Next time we feel our blood boil and our temperature rise, I encourage us to ask: is this something that would offend God? And as far as acting from a place of anger, I would primarily leave that to Jesus, the man who was without sin. □

April 22, 2012

Divine Appointment

John 4:7-15, 23-26, 28-30

We all have a number of strategies to keep our appointments straight from smart phones to the old-school *Daily Planners*. We all have some device – from our own memory to sticky notes – that helps us make and keep our commitments, from attending the school play to the Tuesday business lunch.

Then there are Divine appointments scheduled by the Spirit with a larger calendar and greater purpose in mind. In John 4, we witness such an engagement. While I believe Jesus had his meeting with the woman at the well scheduled, she was not expecting this noon-time appointment. She went to the well to secure the day's water supply, but Jesus had something more lasting in mind. In fact, everything about their encounter took her by surprise. He spoke with her and asked for a drink, which broke most of the current cultural customs. He conversed with her about God and the ultimate when she was focused on the daily grind. She wanted to fill her bucket, while Jesus wanted to fill her soul.

Infused with belief, she returns home no longer on a daily errand but now a holy mission.

Many biblical scholars call her the first evangelist. Life would never be the same. After all, it was a "Divine Appointment."

Among our doctor's visits and play dates, there will be engagements of the Divine. You may wonder, well if it is unscheduled, how can we know? Here are a few clues:

First, it is often unscheduled or unexpected. God will often pencil in a divine appointment without our confirmation just to remind us who is really in charge. Secondly, it often reveals that we have been seeking the temporal to do the job of the eternal. These are the instances when the ultimate comes crashing into our daily plans and priorities and asks if they align. Often we will leave our Divine

Appointments remembering that true satisfaction comes not from what we have or don't have but from who we follow. It reminds us that lasting security comes not from who we are but from Whose we are.

But most of all we will know because, like the woman at the well, we will receive more than we expected and far more than we deserve. We will leave realizing that for the first time in a while, or maybe ever, the thirsting in our souls is quenched. And in some way, life will never be the same. □

April 29, 2012

Now I See

John 9:1-17

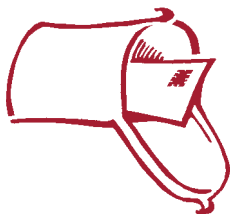
"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now I am found, was blind but now I see."

For most of us we sing this last phrase as a spiritual metaphor rather than a literal event. Yet for the man born blind in John 9, this was his personal testimony: an encounter with Jesus changed his life. Like the man healed by Jesus's spit and mud, we too may have experienced dramatic experiences of change or healing.

The first challenge comes when we say "yes" to Jesus. Secondly, what next? When I came to faith as a teenager, it was a dramatic experience of transformation. I returned from experiencing the presence of the living God and realized that no one else knew what I was talking about. I was a round peg trying to fit myself into a square life.

Perhaps we have not experienced a dramatic change like the blind man. Yet God offers us healing and re-creation in the Holy Spirit every day. Through worship experienced, scripture read,

(Continued on page 28, Living)



Letters & Commentary

Editorial message misleading

Clever, but misleading, is your March “From the Editor’s Desk” [March *Advocate*, pg. 2-3]. It exemplifies the logical fallacy of *ad ignorantiam*. The implied claim is homosexuality is not important to Jesus because he never spoke about or condemned it. Will you say also ‘slavery’ is not an issue because Jesus never used the term?

Jesus did not need to use the term “homosexuality.” He addressed the more primordial subject of marriage making homosexuality pointless. In Matthew 19 he quotes Genesis saying “a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” His lesson teaches sexual expression is only appropriate in the life covenant of heterosexual marriage.

Further, the supreme authority of scripture is not limited to the *ipsissima verba* of the historical Jesus, but the whole of scripture. □

—The Rev. Dr. H.O. “Tom” Thomas serves the Bellevue Charge in Forest

Keep stirring the pot

I am one who delights that you “stirred the pot” again [March *Advocate*, pg. 2-3]. Your two opening pieces for the recent *Advocate* with a focus on the issue of homosexuality are excellent. You are definitely on the correct side of the rampart in this unnecessary battle. I am grateful for the good work you did on this issue and for your work over the years.

In my Bible Study with James Bond, I dedicate Chapter 006 to the issue of snobbery, and my focus is on the homosexual snobbery in our churches. □

—The Rev. Benjamin Pratt is a retired pastor and author who lives in Fairfax

Paul, Old Testament have lots to say on homosexuality

I thought your comments about homosexuality were ridiculous, especially the editorial pages [March *Advocate*, pg. 2-3]. Instead of what Jesus said or did not say, take the words of Paul and some of the Old Testament teachings about the abomination and sin that this life style carries with it. If you don’t know the scriptures I am referring to, I will be glad to furnish them. Why can’t we come out and call sin ... sin, no matter what kind of sin it is. Surely you can do better than this with our *Advocate*. Many people are disturbed by this.

—The Rev. LeRoy V. Jones, retired pastor in Chatham

Hoping for a Christian compromise on homosexuality

My husband, the late Rev. Robert H. Eason, a clergy member of the Virginia Conference, and I moved to South Dakota in 1997. Until his death in April 2010, We both cherished being able to keep in touch with Virginia Conference “doings” through the *Advocate*, ClergyNet, etc. Now I still enjoy these contacts.

The [March] *Advocate* arrived today and I was very pleased to see your editorial page about what Jesus said about homosexuality, as well as the issue’s emphasis. My church here is First United Methodist in Vermillion. About five or six years ago, our church became the first, and still the only, “Reconciling Congregation”* in the Dakotas Conference. Yes, we lost a few members, but we kept our integrity.

I can only hope and pray that General Conference will deal with homosexuality in a truly Christian way. Thank you for the continuing excellence of the *Advocate*. □

—Helen M. Eason, Vermillion, S.D.

* *Reconciling Congregations are faith communities which have approved a statement specifically welcoming people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.*

Authority of scripture and our doctrine are the real issues

The cover of the March issue of *Advocate* was titled “Will one issue tear us apart?” My answer would be no. It is at least three issues that are tearing us apart. The three issues that we don’t agree on are: who Jesus is, the authority of Scripture and what our Doctrinal Standards mean to us today. In your editorial you violated my belief on all three.

You said in your editorial that Jesus had nothing to say on the topic of homosexuality. In his article on page 4, the Rev. Keith Boyette gave a good list of what the Bible says about homosexual practice. If the Bible is the inspired word of God and the Holy Spirit is the “inspirer” and we believe in a triune God, then Jesus spoke these words (all of them). Article I of our Doctrinal Standards says that we believe in a triune God. If the Levitical law condemns the practice of homosexuals and calls it “detestable,” then Jesus condemns it and calls it “detestable.” If God the Father and God the Son are the same person, then how could they contradict themselves? Did God change His mind

about what is moral?

Article VI of our Doctrinal Standards says that the moral part of the Old Testament is still in effect even if we are not under the law. You say in your editorial that your gay friends are no less holy than you are and most are probably more so. That may be true, but you are not the standard for holiness and you are not the one that sets the standard. I believe that apart from the Holy Scripture, none of us knows what holiness is.

You also said in your editorial that Christ taught that all people are children of God, but that is not what Jesus said (if you believe in inspiration and the trinity). Romans 9:8 says: "it is not natural children but children of the promise who are the children of God." In 1 John, Chapter 3, the authoritative scripture (to some of us) tells us who the children of God are and how we can tell who the children of the devil are. Here, again, we must believe the Doctrine of Original Sin, which is Article VII. Universalism and moral relativism are what you are talking about when you say that all are God's children and your gay friends are holy.

You say that we need to move on, and I couldn't agree more, but just look back at your past issues and you tell me who is pushing this issue. Who decides the topics for the *Advocate*? If we knew that, we would know who is pushing the issue.

Being wrong about who Jesus is, denying the authority and the inspiration of Scripture and false doctrine are the stuff that cults are made of, but Christian churches should know and teach better. We used to know better than this. Methodism was born of a Holy Spirit revival when simple people responded, as God led them, to the simple truth of the gospel. We have a program for this and a new program for that, but what we need is another Holy Spirit-led revival. Please join me in prayer for revival, and may God bless His church.

—*The Rev. Allan T. Murphy serves Southall Memorial and New Hope churches in the Farmville District*

Jesus says we must interact with people who are different

Written on the cover of the March edition of the *Advocate* was the question, "Will one issue tear us apart?" followed by, "The United Methodist Church has debated homosexuality for 40 years with no end in sight."

Could it be that this one issue is the very thing God will use to mold us into one and get the church growing again?

Perhaps we need to meditate over the Scripture in Matthew 5:47, "And if you only greet your brothers and sisters what more are you doing than others? Do not even the gentiles do the same?" It seems to me that Jesus is saying the church must interact with folks that are different from one another.

(Continued on page 28, Jesus)

Many homosexuals stay in the UMC despite 'official' church rejection

I commend the *Advocate* for its courage and for its service to the church by thoughtfully addressing the issue of homosexuality in its March issue. I also want to commend all those who wrote for the issue. It is important as we discern our way forward that we hear every voice in the discussion and that we display mutual respect as we articulate our own views and listen to others who may disagree with us.

**Commentary by
Barry Penn Hollar**

I only want to respond to one point made by any of the writers. I was disheartened by the threat in the article by my dear friends, Larry and Betty Baker, who said they would leave the UMC if the church changes its stand on homosexuality. That threat stands in such contrast to the admirable witness of my colleague, Delyn Celec, here at Shenandoah University. Delyn is a graduate of Drew Divinity School who has experienced a call to ordained ministry that her annual conference cannot affirm because of her honest acknowledgment of her sexual orientation and the committed partnership in which she lives. Despite that rejection, she has continued to offer her gifts to the church rather than breaking bonds of Christian fellowship.

I am proud that the Office of Spiritual Life at Shenandoah University has offered her a context in which to share those gifts as our Worship Arts Coordinator, and that she has done so to the benefit of our students, faculty and staff. All this despite Shenandoah's historic and treasured relationship to The United Methodist Church that rejects her. I am proud to be part of a team that has celebrated with her and honored her recent ordination in the "Church Within a Church" movement. She, that movement and Shenandoah University have displayed, I believe, an admirable commitment to the UMC and given an admirable witness to Christian unity amid the deep ambivalence on this issue within the United Methodist family. I believe we play an important role as an institution of higher education by remaining faithful to the church while offering a model for genuinely, prophetically inclusive ministry.

I have no idea whether more people will leave should we change our stand than those who have already left because of the position we have taken. That should not determine what we decide. We should take our stand based on our best prayerful discernment of what the gospel requires of us, what the Scriptures point us toward, and how the Holy Spirit is leading us. Whatever that turns out to be, I believe the loving unity we display — despite our diversity and disagreement — is an essential part of the witness we make to the world.

At this point, I am committed to following Delyn's lead and remaining faithful to my call within The United Methodist Church despite my disagreement with it. I will do that, in part, because I am able to live out that call in a church related institution that embodies our highest values for inclusive ministry and service. I am grateful for that opportunity.

—*The Rev. Dr. Barry Penn Hollar is professor of Religion and Philosophy at Shenandoah University in Winchester*

Living the Word

(Continued from page 25)

an article ingested, a conversation with a friend... God turns on a light within us and we think...

I am going to be more patient with my children this week. I am going to refrain when the gossip mill starts at work. I am going to read my Bible and spend five minutes in prayer. And then we head out the door and work is a nut house, our schedule brims full, and the words "patience" and "children" seem to be far flung. We remember that while we have asked God for change, our lives have remained constant.

Yet God chooses to work by building up the kingdom one healed and changed person at a time. This is why allowing Jesus to heal us, change us, is a risk. Because when we live out God's transformation people will ask, challenge, even resist the "new" us. I take heart that as people challenged the blind man he did not wax eloquently about his experience with Jesus. Until the end of the story he was not even sure who Jesus was. All I know, the blind man said, is that once I was blind and "now I see."

I know it is tempting to avoid any change that Christ brings. It is hard to adopt change ourselves much less deal with others who need or want us to remain the same. We could remain as we are, unmoved and unshaken. Then, of course, we will remain in the dark, rather than truly seeing the glory of the light of day. □

Jesus

(Continued from previous page)

The more difference there is, the more we (those in the church) will witness the power of the risen Christ molding two groups together, such as heterosexuals and homosexuals, into one. I think Ephesians 2:14 says it best, "For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall that is the hostility between us."

I don't know about you, but for me, I can think of nothing that gives me more hope for a better world than to witness and experience the power of the risen Christ at work in the church, molding the different groups into one. I have a hunch that folks outside the church would also want to witness and experience the same.

According to Scripture, there is a dividing wall that Christ will have to break down. I do not think the dividing wall between heterosexuals and homosexuals is hostility; rather, it is the thinking and believing that homosexuals by their very existence are sinful. Here are eight axioms to ponder:

1. Some are born that way;
2. Some can absolutely not change no matter how much they want to;
3. Some fall in love with the same gender and want to get married;
4. Some are called by God to ordained ministry;
5. Some have a very authentic relationship with God;
6. Some adopt children and are very good parents;
7. Some love The United Methodist Church;
8. All are children of God!

Perhaps we should stop debating the homosexual issue and start now with prayer asking the risen Christ to use each person to bring about the miracle of oneness. What if on the cover of the bulletin, every church states that this church accepts all kinds of different people, with a list of some such as gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender folks. Also, the church should put outside the rainbow colors, which is a sign saying that the church accepts and invites homosexuals.

After 40 years, and with God's help, it's time to use this homosexual issue not to tear us apart, but to unite us and get us growing. □

—The Rev. Hillary "Pete" Costello is retired in Warrenton

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2012 Annual Conference Information

June 22-24, Roanoke Civic Center

For updates, visit <www.vaumc.org>

(Continued from page 23)

down to "Relief Supplies" then scroll down until you find the "School Kit" section and click on "sewing patterns."

LAYETTE KIT

- 6 cloth diapers, pre-folded or plain diapers only, not disposable
- 2 shirts - undershirts or onsies
- 2 wash cloths - infant size only - no adult wash cloths
- 2 gowns or sleepers
- 2 diaper pins - must have protective plastic closures - no regular safety pins
- 1 sweater or jacket - open from the front; may be hand knitted, crocheted or sewn; hooded sweatshirts are acceptable
- 2 receiving blankets - 30" x 30" or 32" x 32" sizes recommended - no crib blankets

Assembly: Lay one of the receiving blankets flat on a table. Set aside the diaper pins and place all remaining items on top of the blanket. Fold the blanket around the items and secure the bundle with the diaper pins. Please remove all packaging.

BIRTHING KIT

- 1 small bar soap 1 oz. to 2 oz. size - do not remove from original packaging; small hotel bars are acceptable
- 1 pair latex, surgical or thin rubber gloves - no kitchen or thick rubber work gloves; gloves are not required to be sterile
- 1 square yard of clear plastic sheeting must be 4 mil thick; plastic trash bags and shower curtains are not acceptable
- 3 12-inch long pieces of cotton string - must be clean - secure the pieces of string by bundling and tying them together; no yarn
- 1 single-edge razor blade - must be covered in paper or cardboard to keep it from causing injury; regular shaving razors are not acceptable
- 2 receiving blankets 30" x 30" or 32" x 32" size - no thermal or fleece blankets please
- 1 plastic bag - one gallon size; sealable bags only

Assembly Directions: Fold the plastic

sheeting and blankets so they will fit easily into the plastic bag. Lay the loose items on top of the blankets and plastic sheeting. Slide all items into the plastic bag. Squeeze as much air out of the bag and then seal it.

HEALTH KIT

- 1 hand towel 15" x 25" to 17" x 27"; kitchen cleaning and microfiber towels not acceptable
- 1 washcloth
- 1 comb - needs to be sturdy; no pocket combs or picks; combs without handles are acceptable
- 1 metal nail file or clipper; no emery boards
- 6 adhesive bandages - 3/4" to 1 "size common household band-aids
- 1 bath size soap - 3 oz. and larger sizes only; all brands are acceptable; do not remove from original packaging
- 1 toothbrush - adult size only; do not remove from original packaging
- 1 plastic bag - one gallon size; sealable bags only
- \$1 to purchase toothpaste

Assembly Directions: Lay out the hand towel flat on a table. Lay the washcloth flat in the center of the hand towel. Place all remaining items on top of the washcloth. Fold over the sides of the hand towel to cover all of the items. Fold over one end of the hand towel so that it covers all of the items. Grasp the bundle of items tightly and roll over the remainder of the hand towel tightly. Place the bundle in the plastic bag and seal the bag. **DO NOT INCLUDE TOOTHPASTE!** UMCOR is now purchasing toothpaste in bulk before shipping to ensure that the product does not expire. Do not put single dollar bills in each kit. Toothpaste money must be sent to VA Conf. with shipping monies.

All items included in kits must be NEW items. All emergency kits are carefully planned to make them usable in the greatest number of situations. Since strict rules often govern product entry into international countries, it is important that kits contain only the requested items — nothing more.

Do NOT include any personal notes, money or additional materials in the kits. These things must be removed and will delay the shipment. Kits should be packed in boxes with only one type of kit in each box, with the contents clearly written on the outside of the box.

Monetary donations include: \$1 per kit for processing and shipping; \$1 for UMCOR to purchase toothpaste for health kits.

If you prefer UMCOR to provide kits for you, include: \$12 for UMCOR to provide a health kit; \$11 for UMCOR to provide a school kit; \$35 for UMCOR to provide a baby/layette kit; \$8 for UMCOR to provide a birthing kit. If your church has already collected other kits not mentioned here, they will be accepted.

Send monetary donations on one check, payable to "Virginia Conference UMC," earmarked for "Kits" and mail to: Treasurer, Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church, P.O. Box 5605, Glen Allen, VA 23058. Do not place checks inside the boxes. Your checks will be accepted any time prior to Annual Conference. Please make every effort to send your checks no later than Aug. 31. Checks will not be accepted at Annual Conference.

Collection Site: Roanoke Civic Center Parking Lot A (northeast corner of building). COLLECTION HOURS ARE: FRIDAY from 9 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. and SATURDAY from 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Questions regarding kit contents should go to the conference Mission Office at 1-800-768-6040, ext. 144, or (804) 521-1144, or sent by e-mail to <Mission@vaumc.org>.

Questions about the kit collection site should go to Kits for Conference coordinator, the Rev. Louis Strickler, at (540) 774-8126 or <pastorlouis@woodlawnumc.org>.

(An appeal has been made recently by Church World Service regarding a kit drive by that agency. The 2012 Virginia Annual Conference UMCOR Kit drive is not to be confused with that of Church World Service.)



Clergy & Diaconal

Deaths

Kitty Cline Cox,

92, of Richmond, died Feb. 23, 2012, in Richmond. She was preceded in death by her parents, the Rev. Dr. John Cline and Kitty Plott Cline; her brother, the Rev. John Maxwell Cline; and her husband of 50 years, John Finley Cox. The oldest daughter of a Methodist minister, she was raised in many different towns throughout North Carolina. She received her undergraduate degree from Greensboro College and did graduate work at Duke University and Northwestern University. She began a long career in Christian Education at Trinity UMC in Durham, N.C. She later worked at John Wesley UMC and later at Stratford Hills UMC in Richmond. The last church she served was Trinity UMC in Richmond, where she was a member. She was active as a diaconal minister in the Virginia Conference. A memorial service was held at The Hermitage at Cedarfield.



Cox

Margaret Crawford Crute Sisson

died Feb. 19, 2012. She is survived by the Rev. Richard B. Sisson, with whom she shared 50 years of ministry. Margaret was a leader in the United Methodist Women and the Virginia Conference Clergy Spouses' group. She was also a licensed practical nurse. Margaret traveled with mission teams to India, Russia, Costa Rica, Belize, Cuba and Mozambique. Her funeral



Sisson

service was held at Clarksbury UMC in Deltaville.

Margaret Rachael Adams Ander-

son, 99, died on Monday, Feb. 13, 2012, in Chesterfield County. Her husband of 64 years, the Rev. Marshall Wilson Anderson Sr., predeceased her in death in 2002. Margaret shared with Marshall a ministry of 50 years in the Virginia Conference, where Marshall served 44 churches over the span of his ministry. Margaret taught in public schools and religious education for a number of years in Campbell, Albemarle and Franklin counties, and worked at the University of Virginia as a recorder of student records. Her memorial service was held at Providence UMC in Richmond.

Minnie Green, mother of the Rev. Linda Driver Ray, died Feb. 1, 2012, in Richmond. A memorial service was held in Oak Ridge, Tenn. She was a sergeant in the Women's Army Corps, working on the Manhattan Project from 1943-1946, and then worked for the Department of Energy until her retirement in 1972. She was a member of First UMC in Oak Ridge, where she was a member of the United Methodist Women. Linda is the pastor of the Rehoboth Charge, Caroline County, Fredericksburg District.

Samuel Wilson Haynes, husband of former Virginia Conference United

Methodist Women's President Addie Haynes and father of the Rev. Dr. Kevin Haynes, died Feb. 26, 2012. Kevin is the pastor at Greenville UMC, Staunton District.

Dottie Crowe, 84, widow of the Rev. Karl L. Crowe, died March 10, 2012, in Fishersville. She was a school teacher for 37 years. Her service was held at Greenville UMC.

Lucille A. Roughton, 95, died March 9, 2012, in Lexington, Ky. She was the widow of the late Rev. A. Ernest Roughton.

Gaynelle W. Lovern, widow of the Rev. Thomas Y. Lovern Jr., died Jan. 20, 2012, in Salem.

James M. Henry, father of Kathie Vest and father-in-law to District Superintendent the Rev. John Vest of the James River District, died March 12, 2012. James' wife, Bernice Henry, died in December, while John's mother, Daisy Vest, died Jan. 12.

Births

Kenneth "Mac" McPhail Stabler was born Feb. 20, 2012. He is the grandson of the Rev. Anne M. Sisson. Anne is pastor of the Axton Charge-Beckham/Irisburg/Carroll Memorial, in the Danville District. Mac's parents are Kam and Bethany Stabler of Charlotte, N.C.

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Bishops at General Conference?

We pray, preach and preside



Charlene Payne Kammerer
Bishop of the
Virginia Conference

United Methodists from across the globe will gather in Tampa in late April and early May for 2012 General Conference. This will be an historic Conference because, for the first time, there will be almost 40 percent of delegates who come from outside the United States. This new reality will surely impact our conversations and decision-making. We will be invited to lean on God's wisdom and grace to consider what is best for the Body of Christ and our life together.

Some people have asked me: "Since bishops can't speak on the floor or vote on legislation, just what do bishops DO at General Conference? We see your role at Annual Conference but can't imagine what it looks like in a General Conference setting." The role of bishops there will be primarily three functions: PRAY, PREACH, PRESIDE.

At any time, a bishop might be invited to lead the delegates in prayer during a plenary session. Prayers will regularly be offered in legislative committee meetings, delegation meetings, social gatherings of delegations, special-interest luncheon and dinner meetings and Council of Bishops meetings. Praying for and with the Body of Christ is something special and holy for all bishops of The United Methodist Church.

Bishops will be preaching at all the main worship services for the delegates. Bishops are also invited to preach at area United Methodist churches prior to the convening of General Conference. Bishops might be asked to preach at services of Eucharist or special worship gatherings around the edges of General Conference. I had the privilege of preaching at General Conference in 2004, and it was a humbling experience.

The expected role of bishops at General Conference is to preside at the plenary sessions. There is a special Committee on Presiding Officers that discerns which active bishop will preside at which session. All bishops need to be prepared at any time. We are given about a half-day notice to prepare and digest the information for any given session and its agenda.

A bishop has to be attentive to anyone who desires to speak, in any language, and wait for translation to happen if needed. A bishop needs to be sensitive to allow many voices to speak and not just call on one or several delegates who might want to dominate the conversation on any given topic. A bishop must decide when to pause in the agenda, perhaps for silence or prayer.

At the very least, the role of presiding is very demanding of the bishops. And, of course, the delegates have to get used to each bishop's style of presiding each session, even when *Roberts' Rules of Order* are the general guideline all bishops follow.

As you pray for all the delegates who will work very hard at our upcoming General Conference, I also ask you to remember to pray for the bishops. We covet your prayers to prepare us to PRAY, PREACH AND PRESIDE!

Grace and Peace,

Charlene Kammerer

Charlene Kammerer

Connecting with the *Virginia Advocate* official newsmagazine of the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church

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Deadlines

The *Virginia Advocate* is published once a month. The deadline to submit news and ad copy for the March 2012 issue is Feb. 6. For more information on future deadlines, contact Peggy Cribbs in the *Advocate* office or visit the Web.

Advertising/Tributes

Rates for advertising and Tributes are available upon request.

Local Church News

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

Letters

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

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