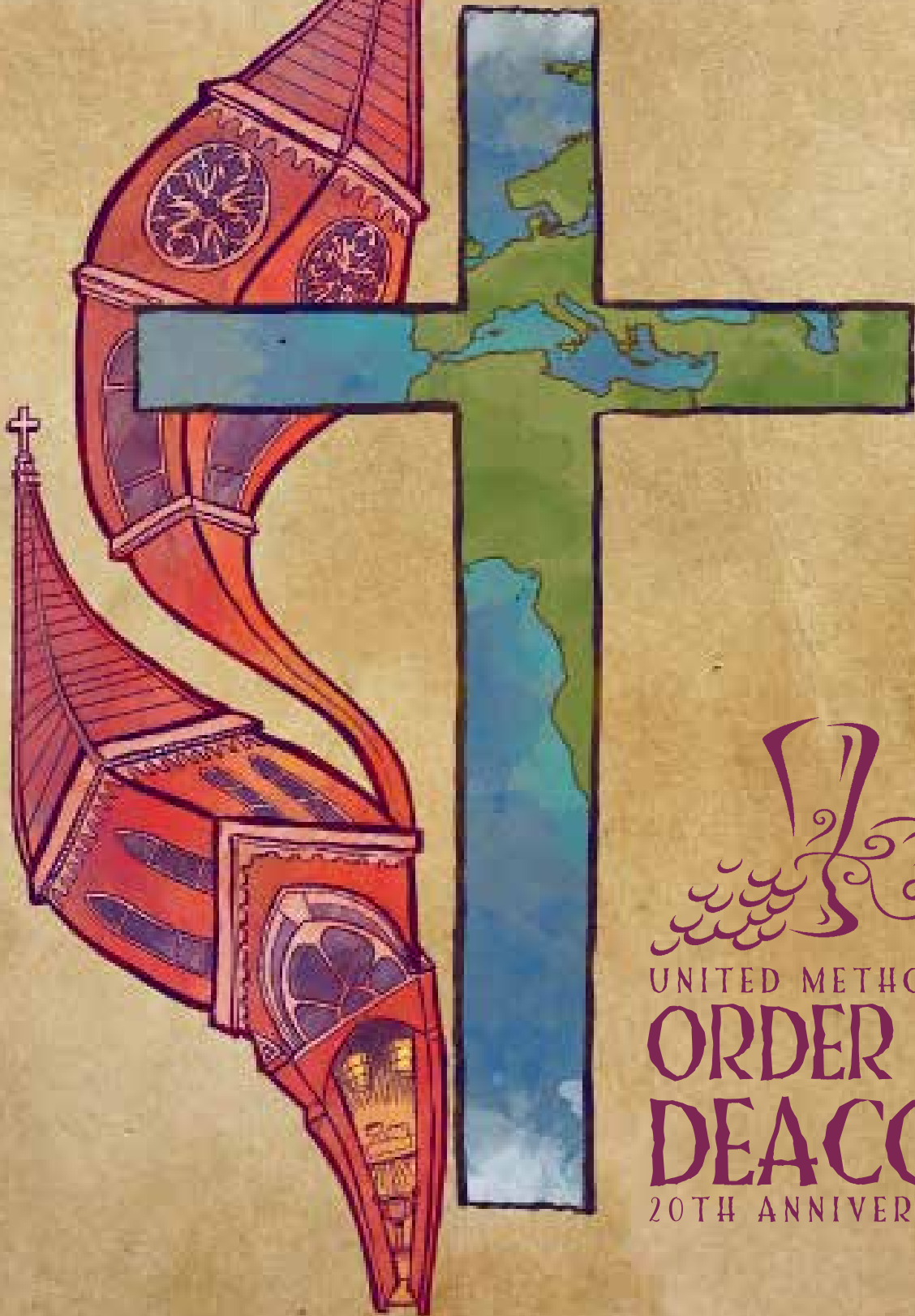


Advocate



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Virginia Advocate

The official magazine of
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PILLOW TALK



Madeline Pillow
Editor

Being right
or doing
the right
thing



Kirk Nave, senior pastor of Braddock Street UMC in Winchester, wrote a moving blog about the death of an African-American man on March 1. With an investigation now being conducted, it still isn't clear if it was suicide or if he was shot by police. This led to peaceful protests and, more negatively, an incident of racial targeting at neighboring Shenandoah University.

In his blog, Nave said, "Black lives matter" is a statement that needs to be affirmed until we have rebuilt trust in one another. These words gave me pause because of their stark truth.


Formed in 2012, the Black Lives Matter movement has united and divided people. When I first heard the name, I asked myself, "Don't all lives matter?" Even in recent weeks, many people all over the Internet are still divided over the message of this group. Some even state that it is adding to the racial divide in America.

Alicia Garza, a founding member of the movement, says the hashtag that started it all is not meant as a divide. "We're not saying Black lives are more important than other lives, or that other lives are not criminalized and oppressed in various ways. We remain in active solidarity with all oppressed people who are fighting for their liberation, and we know that our destinies are intertwined."

Amongst all of this dialogue, I finally felt the click of understanding. As humans there is something innate in the way we interact that becomes a contest about who is right at the expense of others. The ultimate grown-up edition of "I win." But, in the end, is it really worth it to be right rather than do the right thing?

Yes, ALL lives do matter! It's a shame we have to say it. But if we continually shout that over the heads of the Black Lives Matter movement what we lose is acknowledgement. Who are we to deny people who feel pain and hurt caused by this society? If we, as Christians, have faith in a God who reaches the lost, the least and the last, then what we do on this earth should reflect that belief. In this case, noticing that something is wrong.

As a white person in this country, I haven't had to experience prejudice because of my race. This doesn't come from a place of "white shame" but from a place of simple truth. So if I keep rolling my eyes and saying, "All lives matter" and covering my ears to others saying "Black lives matter," I am failing to hear the experience of other people, other Americans, other followers of faith. For the black community today in many places, there is still widespread racism, prejudice and violence. Even if we would like to believe we have improved since the days of the Civil War (I know I do) we can't pretend that we don't have more improving to do.

Acknowledging that Black lives matter, isn't a slight against other races, it's the recognition, the opening of our ears to experiences that we may not be aware of — as painful as that can be. Maybe if we try to stop keeping score or feeling as if it is one race against another, it could simply be one race for another, as Kirk Nave said, until trust is rebuilt once more. 

Madeline

P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058

Phone: 1-800-768-6040 or
804-521-1100

Fax: 804-521-1174

E-mail: advocate@vaumc.orgWebsite: www.vaumc.org

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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 Christmas trees or Easter trees/crosses, and any item over two months old. Color photos are 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 editor reserves the right to edit all letters.

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Correction: In the January issue of the Advocate, we incorrectly quoted The Rev. Dr. Justin Allen as having a PhD rather than a DTh (Doctoral of Ministry degree). We apologize to The Rev. Dr. Allen for the mistake.

Cover art by Charlie Baber.

The *Virginia Advocate* Staff

Linda S. Rhodes | Virginia Conference Director of Communications

Madeline Pillow | Editor

Cathryn Huff | Graphic Designer

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LETTERS



Letter to the Readers

In fall 2015, the *Advocate* staff asked our readers to respond to a survey which focused on areas in which we excelled and where we could improve as well as ways we could better provide content that our readers wanted.

First, thank you to those who took the time to respond.

Second, we felt it was important to let you know that we heard your feedback and are actively looking for ways to address any concerns and suggestions.

An overwhelming response from the survey was that the *Advocate* needed to feature more stories about local churches and ministries.

The fruit of this particular effort makes its debut in this issue with our "A Day in the Life" series found on page 16.

This series will focus on local churches and individuals doing great ministry work and celebrate the unique people and work done within the Virginia Conference. "A Day in the Life" follows around those involved so that readers get a sense of what these ministries look like on any given day.

This month, we focused on Joanna Dietz, minister of Mission and Service at Braddock Street United

Methodist Church on the Winchester District. For online subscribers, our exclusive content this month follows her with a video from videographer Nick Ruxton.

If you know of any ministries or individuals which deserve more awareness within our conference, please e-mail *Advocate* editor Madeline Pillow at **MadelinePillow@vaumc.org**.

Thank you for letting the *Advocate* tell and share your stories.

Keeping our focus on God

Iwant to thank Barbara Cousar for her commentary in the Feb. issue of the *Advocate*. Some of the things she said greatly moved me to contemplate and seek further understanding.

Barbara said, "Blame is not the game."

This truly correlates to what Jesus said, "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye but do not notice the log in your own eye?" (Luke 6: 41)

She also said, "We must have equal playing field." This is so true. It seems to me the equal playing field is from Genesis 1:27: "So God created humankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

Every person in this world has in him or her the image of God. God did that for you without your permission from the get go. We don't worship a passive God. This image of God will not stay dormant; it will surface, and, when it does, it will always reveal some characteristics of Jesus. What she says next is extremely important:

"Keeping our focus on God as the head, staying centered on God and having the mindset of Jesus Christ." If we take to heart what Barbara is recommending here, we will be able to identify the characteristics of Jesus that will surface from every person at one time or another and when we do, make no mistake, it will enhance our relationship with that person which is the very thing the risen Christ wants and is what the Rev. Barbara Cousar is advocating in her commentary.

Thank you so much,

– Pete Costello,
retired Certified Evangelist

Teen focuses on poverty

Poverty has always been an issue within our society. Whether you see homeless persons on the streets or in run-down neighborhoods, it is in our lives, and something needs to be done about it. Here in Gloucester County, there

Letters to the Editor are printed on a space-available basis. Letters may be e-mailed to MadelinePillow@vaumc.org by the first of the month.

are a multitude of little tents behind the Food Lion at Gloucester Point. In each one is a person without a home, barely any shelter or necessities for living. I always see these individuals begging for change at the local 7-Eleven and Subway.

I have always wondered, what are the best strategies used to alleviate poverty?

This is what led to my idea of starting up a donation for my Senior Boards project. I knew winter was approaching quickly and many in our area do not have anything to shield them from the frigid weather. So I set up a donation that would better the lives of those impoverished by giving items such as thick socks, gloves, blankets and coats, helping them to stay warm.

With the aid of mentor, Sondra Colbert, my supportive family and the generous members of Bethany

United Methodist Church, I was able to acquire many articles of clothing and blankets. The entire guest room at my house is filled with bags and boxes containing what people have donated. It is an effort just to move around in there. The turnout was very successful and highly exceeded my expectations.

I'd like to thank everyone who contributed to this cause. This isn't just about getting my senior project done and getting a good grade; this is about doing something for the good of humanity and helping those in need. Knowing that there are so many who are willing to help those less fortunate truly brings a smile to my face.

— Hannah Campbell
Bethany UMC, Gloucester Point,
pictured below with the donations
she gathered for the poor.



Identifying who we are

How good to see a recent picture of retired Bishop Tim. W. Whitaker who is scheduled to speak at Virginia Wesleyan College in March. And, in this photo, Tim is wearing his clerical collar!



Why are we as clergy persons so afraid of identifying who we are? We are, of course still free to wear what we like, and some clergy wear very casual attire, even in our visits to hospitals. I have chosen to wear a clerical collar in hospitals. One would be amazed at the respect one gets since there is no question about your identity.

A clergy friend, now deceased, used to say, "If the guy driving a soft drink truck can wear a uniform, why can't we wear a clerical collar?"

One day, while out at Randolph-Macon College, my wife called to let me know of a suicide in our church family. I quickly

"Letters," cont. on next page.)

LETTERS

"Letters," cont. from page 5.)

drove to the home where the police were gathered. Dressed casually, the family came, but had no idea of who I was! Wear a collar all the time? Of course not. I've seen Tim many times dressed casually or in a business suit. But when I am in my collar, I am very aware of who I am and of the Christ I was called to serve and His Church.

One day in Kohl's, in my collar, an older couple, who had a grandchild in her stroller, said, "Father, would you please bless this child?"

I said, "Of course." I reached down and said, "Lord, bless this child."

They never knew who I really was! So friends, dress any way you like, but Tim, my friend, thank you for not being afraid of letting others know who you are, and for your teaching ministry about the future identity and mission of the Church and that you stand in our great Wesleyan tradition.

— Henry E. Riley, Jr., retired elder,
Chesterfield

From Members to Disciples

Marc Brown, director of Connectional Ministries at the conference center, challenged us in our district to make disciples out of members. To do this, our District Superintendent Bob Parks said we must

begin turning the "ordinary" into "extraordinary" by thinking out of the box or "coloring outside the lines."

One of our churches in the Farmville District, Cherry Hill United Methodist Church, located in South Boston under the guidance of the Rev. Patricia Neilson, retired local pastor, has begun doing just that. With an average of 24 members, Rev. Neilson entered the church at a time when the members felt they could no longer make any meaningful contribution to the UMC or their community. But in time God came busting in and offered ways that were different but just as meaningful.

Ricky Pool, a member, had recently made a trip to Malawi, Africa where his friend almost died and he witnessed the lack of blood services or massive hospitals in the region. With no organization like the Red Cross, there was no way to conduct blood drives or even facilities to hold the blood if it was collected.

When Ricky returned, he shared his concerns at a worship service. Everyone was moved and began a campaign in the community of South Boston/Halifax to raise \$3000 to supply a small blood freezer for the hospital. They enlisted the aid of individuals, other church groups and local businesses.

The funds came in quickly they provided a larger freezer, blood analyzer and the resources to collect and store pints of blood.

The best part of all was Skyping with the doctor and staff at the hospital. They saw the freezer and collection items in the background as the group sang their thanks to God for this gift of life. Today there is an ongoing effort to secure some land and build a larger facility to better serve our brothers and sisters in Malawi. When the land is secured, Cherry Hill UMC will once again work with God to make the building a reality.

The church continues to seek out missions that older, less mobile believers can be of service in. At present, we are offering free dinners every other month and giving local music groups a stage after dinner to bring songs of praise and thanksgiving after the meal.

Rev. Neilson states, "We have a loving and committed older congregation and we thank God for his hand in using us to further his kingdom."

— Sue Mayo is a member of the
Farmville District Committee on
Ordained Ministry.



COMMENTARY

Effective pastors never marry

By John Vest

I was talking to a very active and engaged member of the church about possibly becoming a member of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee in the New Year. Filling the slots on this important committee has always been difficult partly because the church I serve does not have a rich history of smooth pastoral transitions, and the transition between the previous pastor leaving and my arrival did not break that tradition.

"You should join," I invited. "There's nothing going on. We have a great team in place, and we don't anticipate any changes any time soon."

"That's good," she said. "You are still in the honeymoon phase." (I took that as a compliment since I am in the middle of my third year at this appointment.)

"I have served on the SPRC before," my potential committee worker informed me. "It was when (name of a former pastor) was here. Unfortunately, it was during the divorce."

Since that former pastor is still married to his first wife, I knew what she meant: When the time came for the church to receive a new pastor and the pastor to receive a new

church it had not gone well.

Why do we tell our clergy a good appointment is like a good marriage? "Sure, there will be problems," we say with paternal wisdom, "but, if you just love each other, communicate well and have a strong commitment to each other and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, all will be fine." That may be good advice for my actual marriage, but in the United Methodist itinerancy, where the average stay for a pastor in Virginia still hovers below four years, it is a recipe for heartache.

There are only three ways a marriage can come to an end: annulment, divorce or death. Annulment is the legal statement that the relationship never technically existed and was never valid. Divorce, whether it is contested or "no-fault," is always a painful thing to experience. Despite what we see on television and in the movies, I don't believe most people are so cavalier about marriage that divorce is not painful. And death is, well, death. As the song declares, "Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die!"


So, what are our options? Is it really viable for a honeymoon to go

on forever? I think not. A honeymoon is a phase, just like the moon has phases. Why do we think it is called a honeyMOON? Life simply isn't real without the ebb and flow of joys and struggles. Every honeymoon, by definition, must come to an end otherwise it isn't a honeymoon.

I suppose we could have a dating relationship for our years together. That does signify a distinct relationship among creation. In the Christian Church, where we still believe there is a significant difference between living together and being married together, a dating relationship would establish some boundaries of intimacy and professionalism that could help us in the transitions. (As a district superintendent, I saw too many issues of boundaries being crossed between pastors and church members.)

How about we take the idea of the Family of God seriously; not the patriarchal model of seniority with grandparents, parents, children, doting aunts,

eccentric uncles and the rest, but a real family? A family where love is genuine, obligation is both bestowed and earned and people quite simply come and go. Families expand as when my son married, and families contract as when he and his bride established their careers across the state from us. Are we still family? Of course! Do we still live under the same roof, do the things we used to do and exist as one congregated entity? No, and that is the way it is supposed to be. Oh, I love my son and daughter-in-law deeply and miss them terribly, but I would have been a poor parent if I expected him to stay with me his entire life, and I would have been a failure as a parent if he chose to.

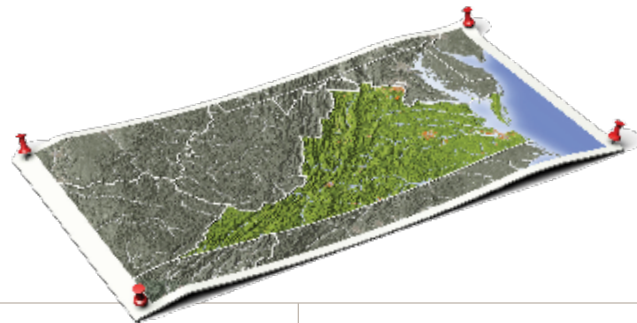
That's why I think effective pastors should never marry. Families can sustain their health long after a marriage comes to an end. 

— The Rev. Dr. John N. Vest
is lead pastor of Peakland UMC,
Lynchburg District.



Illustration by Amika Wooten.

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Schmidt urges convocation to address spirituality through prayers of discernment

By Madeline Pillow

Finding out why people aren't coming to church has caused a frantic period of searching. This has led to all the different ways church members have tried to bring in new members with crafted sermons made not to offend, rock music in the sanctuary and coffee in the narthex, the Rev. Dr. Frederick W. Schmidt Jr. told approxi-

mately 300 clergy and laity at the March 5 Bishop's Convocation on Prayer at Trinity UMC in Richmond.

But Schmidt, who is Reuben P. Job Associate Professor of Spiritual Formation at Garrett-Evangelical Seminary in Evanston, Ill., noted that what is absent from the church is prayers for discernment. And through this significant type of prayer can be found answers to what the church is and how the life of the church is nurtured.

"What we should be asking ourselves and those who come through our doors is not, 'How would you like to contribute to the contract?' It is not, 'Can we convince you that the

contract is important?' What we should be asking is, 'Who is God calling you to be as a part of the body of Christ?' and that task should be undertaken with prayers for discernment," said Schmidt.

Prayers for discernment

"Those prayers — prayers for discernment — are, sadly, largely absent from today's church," continued Schmidt. "Our leadership conversations might be prefaced with an invocation but they have little bearing on the progress of what takes place in the meetings that we have," Schmidt said. "I sometimes tell my students the relationship between an invocation and a meeting of an administrative council is the same relationship between the national anthem and the progress of a football game. We will pray, but then everything else that we will do is done on other terms."

And it is in these prayers that Schmidt finds power. "In spite of the nearly complete absence of those prayers from the church's life, prayers for discernment constitute the only spiritual discipline that I believe could change everything."

Schmidt named four things that praying for discernment requires, described the nature of prayers for discernment

Dr. Frederick Schmidt speaks at the Bishop's Convocation on Prayer.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

and discussed how these prayers could change the church.

The four things that are required are a robust ecclesiology; a belief that God will show up; that the Church will believe the reality to which the Gospel witnesses; and that, guided by these prayers, questions would be divided between those for ourselves ("I" questions), the group ("we" questions) and God.

Quoting Alexander Schmemmann, an influential Orthodox Christian priest, Schmidt said a church that is not sold into society can use these kinds of prayers to ask what God's will is for them and can listen with a freedom not afforded to churches with a societal agenda.

At the conclusion, Schmidt asked participants to give way to prayer that is the business of the church as well as being a church that is harder to manage as a result.

"God's grace was never anything we could manage anyway," Schmidt said.

Following Schmidt's plenary, participants had time to attend two workshops out of 11 focused on prayer.

Betsey Davis led the workshop, "Spirituality and Arts: A Bead and a Prayer" about the use of Protestant prayer beads.

Prayer beads are in the ancient tradition of the church. Beginning with

fringe on garments, by the third century people moved pebbles from pocket to pocket to keep track of their prayers, said Davis, and then moved to knots on a string, and finally, to beads on a string. The Protestant movement with prayer beads began in the 1980s in the Episcopal Church.

Teaching our youths to pray

Paulo Lopes, conference director of Ministries with Young People, led a workshop about teaching youths how to pray with a workshop titled: "Teach them how to pray: Introducing a new generation to a life of prayer."


"I wouldn't say that we need to teach kids different ways of praying, I would say that we need to teach them to pray period. Our kids don't know how to pray," Lopes said. "We are talking, particularly today, about becoming a church that discerns God's will in prayer and that's a task that we will only see the fruit of through the new generation of believers."

Lopes sees The Bishop's Convocation on Prayer event as an important one for youths as well as adults because prayer is a spiritual discipline that has fallen by the wayside.

"Prayer is just one of those neglected areas of church life, of Christian life.

Particularly in our churches that have become so institutional in nature, we very quickly go about business in our day-to-day and pay very little attention to prayer," said Lopes.

For Davis, the number of workshops highlighted the individuality of prayer for each church and individual.

"We're all different. We all have different learning styles. Some people need other tools, other ways of experiencing prayer. We like different ways of speaking to one another, so prayer is the same way, we need different ways to talk to God," said Davis. 

— Madeline Pillow is editor of the Advocate.



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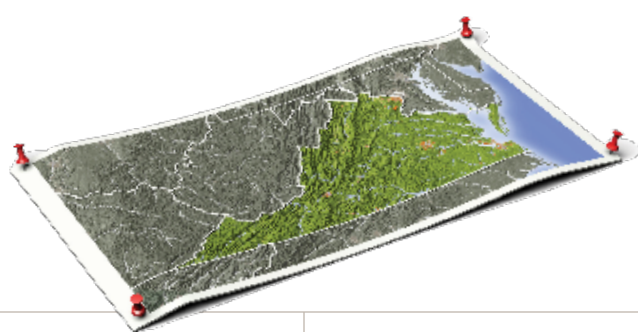
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The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Shenandoah University office of Spiritual Life sends team to conference for racial justice

By Keith Jones Pomeroy

The office of Spiritual Life at Shenandoah University sent a biracial group of eight students, the Spiritual Life coordinator (myself), and the vice president of Student Life, the Rev. Dr. Rhonda VanDyke Colby, to New York City Jan. 21-23 to attend a conference at the

Trinity Institute at Trinity Wall Street Episcopal Church.

Theme of the conference was “Sacred Conversations for Racial Justice: Listen for a Change.” The subtitle had a double meaning for attendees. Within a dialogue about race, it is easy to get caught up in wanting to share our own views and stories (or perhaps our reasons why we are not racist), yet it is equally, if not more, important that we take time to listen to others and truly hear what they are saying. We must also be open to allow change within our own ideas, attitudes and behaviors. Listening for a

change implies that we must be “quick to listen, slow to speak” and open “to be transformed by the renewing of [our] minds” by the God who calls us to reconciliation and redemption (James 1:19, Romans 12:2, NRSV).

For three days, we struggled to understand the long and complex history of race relations, doing self-reflective soul searching and looking for practical ways to move forward. We listened to authors, theologians, pastors and practitioners who are working toward racial justice, such as Nicholas Kristoff, New York Times columnist; Michelle Norris, journalist and former NPR correspondent; and Kelly Brown Douglas, Episcopal priest and theologian.

We met in small groups to have deeper, more open and personal dialogue about issues. Throughout the conference we were educated, challenged, humbled, encouraged and inspired. Anna Lopynski, a Faith Seeking Justice Christian Leadership Program student and member of Floris United Methodist Church, Arlington District, said that through the conference, “I was reminded of the power of the Christian community when we rally together around a cause.”

In this past year, the Black Lives Matter movement has heavily

Shenandoah University team at Trinity Wall Street Episcopal Church: Cherish Williams, Alex Carney, Rhonda VanDyke Colby, Danielle LaBar, Taylor Butts, Alex Moore, Olivia Baker, Keith Jones Pomeroy, Liam Fairfax and Anna Lopynski.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

influenced higher education. Much of this gained national momentum after students and athletes at the University of Missouri successfully campaigned to oust the president for his lack of response in taking racial grievances seriously on campuses. A plethora of university campaigns have followed, with student organizers pushing for greater recognition and rights. Within the office of Spiritual Life at Shenandoah, we are attempting to better understand the racial climate on campus and what we are doing to foster or inhibit racial justice. This task is one that takes time and is not easy. It is a process of looking at the log within our own eye.

In a lecture at Western Michigan University in 1963, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. prophetically called out the church in its complicity toward racial injustice by noting that Sunday morning is “the most segregated hour in this nation.” There has been marginal improvement in the past five decades since this statement, but we are still far from the dream. Many of the speakers at Trinity focused on how the church can be a voice of hope and change, but said that we must first confront our own demons. Kelly Brown Douglass challenged the church to move into the “ditch” — the messy,

muddy area that is our history before we can get to the other side.

In the end, we were left with more questions than answers. Within myself, I was hoping for some easy solutions that would address my own bias as well as the systemic and structural racism within our church and society. Alas, work like this is not done overnight. We, the Church, need education, humility and creativity to work through these issues.

Ethicist Emilie Townes said, “We have a strong theology of sin down, but we skip over a theology of creation.” This creative imagination can help lead us to reconciliation and a new future.

What are our churches doing to strive for racial justice? How are we confronting our past? How are we sharing solidarity with those seeking justice in the present? And how are we co-creating the kingdom of God for our future? These are questions that hit at the heart of God’s desire for redemption in a broken world. 🍷

— Keith Jones Pomeroy is Spiritual Life coordinator at Shenandoah University in Winchester.

Lindsey Baynham named associate director of Clergy Excellence

By Linda S. Rhodes

The Rev. Lindsey Baynham has been appointed to serve as associate director of the conference Center for Clergy Excellence, effective July 1. She will focus on call, candidacy and discernment and expand the conference’s capacity to reach people beyond current channels for leadership development.



The Rev. Lindsey Baynham

“Lindsey is an experienced, creative pastor, and she will expand the conference’s capacity to help individuals and congregations hear God’s call toward leadership development,” said the Rev. Meredith McNabb, director of Clergy Excellence. “I’m delighted to welcome her to the Clergy Excellence team to multiply our ministry to reach the gifted people whom God is calling, but who might not otherwise think of becoming United Methodist clergy.”

Baynham currently serves as Minister Director for Arise Campus Ministry at George Mason University, Fairfax.

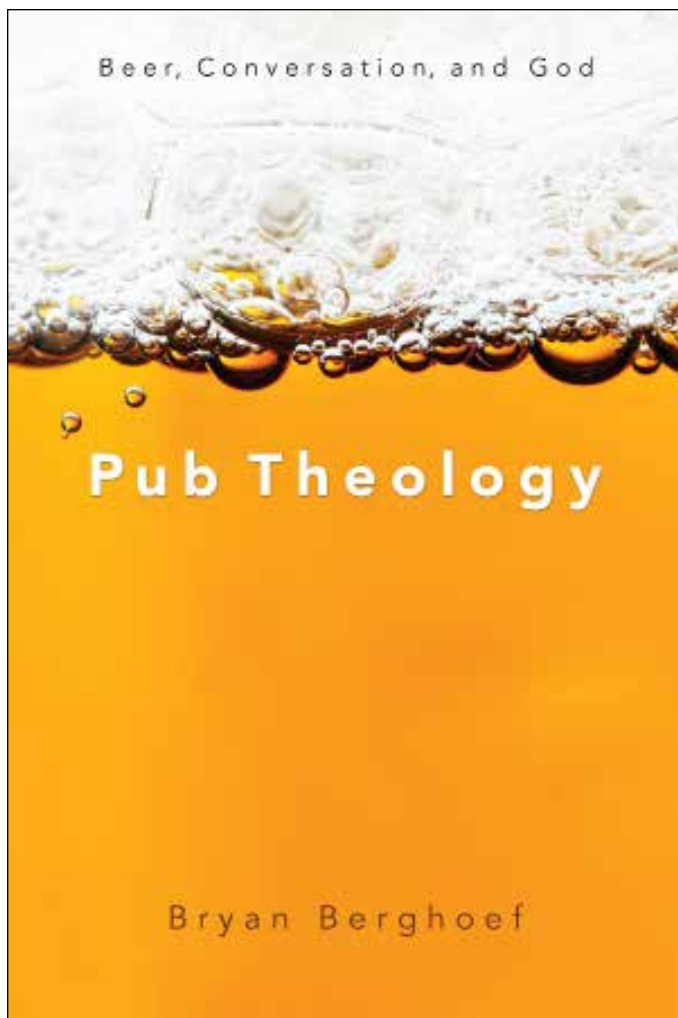
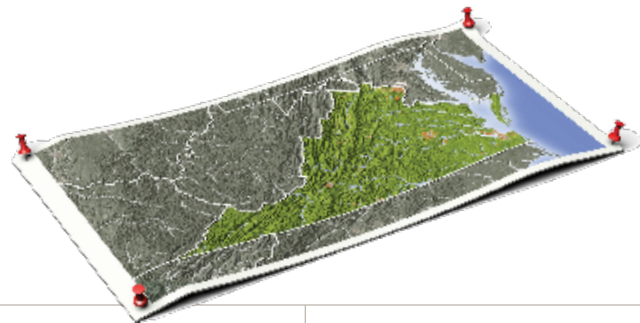
A Virginia native, she attended Randolph-Macon College in Ashland and earned her Master of Divinity at Duke Divinity School in Durham, N.C. Following seminary, she was appointed associate pastor of Fairfax UMC in Fairfax, where she served for three years. She was ordained an Elder in the Virginia Conference in 2015.

“I am passionate about equipping others in ministry in the church and journeying with those who sense a call to ministry,” Baynham said. “I look forward to seeking out leaders to empower and strengthen churches in Virginia as well as the body of Christ.”

After July 1, she can be reached in the Clergy Excellence office in the Virginia United Methodist Center in Glen Allen at (804) 521-1126. 🍷

— Linda S. Rhodes is Virginia Conference director of Communications.

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Outside the walls of the church: Pub Theology

By Bill Pike

On the banks of the Haw River in Alamance County, N.C., sits the small, but once thriving textile village of Saxapahaw. Alamance County is a large rolling landscape in which tobacco farms and textile mills once thrived. Those days are in the past, but new life has sprouted in Saxapahaw.

The large, brick fortress on the banks of the Haw

River that in its previous life was a textile dye house now holds, condos, a concert hall, restaurant, craft brewer and a nondescript building that connects to the former mill. That low-slung building houses a butcher shop featuring assorted meats from local farmers, a charter school and a gourmet restaurant in an old filling station. During the week and weekends, locals and visitors from all over have made Saxapahaw a destination.

It was Easter 2015, and my family and I were at the home of my sister and her husband. They live only a few miles from Saxapahaw, so on Sunday morning we attended Saxapahaw UMC.

As the Pastor Sue Eldon welcomed everyone, she also made several announcements. One of those important messages caught me off guard. Pastor Eldon extended an invitation to join her across the river at the Eddy Pub on the first and third Wednesdays at 5:30 p.m. for Pints with the Pastor.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. A small rural United Methodist church and its pastor were inviting her congregation and their friends to join her for a pint at the local pub. Talk about getting outside the walls of the church; this was a bold strategy! Described as an opportunity for fellowship

and conversation, this invitation resonated with me, and I resolved to share Pastor Eldon's initiative with our senior pastor at our home church, Trinity UMC in Richmond.

At our next staff meeting at Trinity, I communicated what I had heard from Saxapahaw UMC. Immediately, the staff struggled with the name of the church. The concept of Pints with the Pastor garnered some giggles and lighthearted comments, but no serious consideration was given to the idea.

Later in the spring, the Virginia United Methodist Conference announced the schedule for Annual Conference in Roanoke. One of the pre-conference events was Pub Theology to be held at a local watering hole in downtown Roanoke. The hosts for this event were Dr. Kendall Soulen, from Wesley Seminary, and the Rev. Jason Micheli from Aldersgate UMC in Alexandria who started Theology on Tap at his church. The Roanoke event was billed as a fellowship gathering to listen and discuss theology.

We pushed through the summer, and fall was upon us, and occasionally I would bring Pints with the Pastor back to the table. Trinity Senior Pastor Larry Lenow had become involved in a small group of

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

pastors who were working with a consultant developing leadership strategies and the concept of pushing the church outside of its walls.

Not known for standing still, Pastor Lenow quietly did his diligent research related to Pints with the Pastor, and in late December he asked me to start planning for our first gathering. In his research, Pastor Lenow found an established program called Pub Theology.

In 2012, Bryan Berghoef wrote the book *Pub Theology*. Berghoef was the founding pastor of Watershed Church in Traverse City, Mich. The premise is pretty simple, according to the book's cover: Beer, Conversation and God, with a focus on taking church talk outside its confines into places where church leaders haven't been looking.

The book's 16 chapters cover quite a bit of territory, including Scripture references correlated with Berghoef's insights and experiences interacting with people in the pub. But the book also provides a framework or template that can be used for starting a Pub Theology program in any community.

During the last few years, in cities of all sizes across the United States, the art of brewing beer at the local level has exploded. Craft brewers

have helped to reinvent an industry that was once controlled by large, mass-produced breweries. Richmond hasn't been immune to this resurgence. Scott's Addition is a hefty parcel of land that once was dominated by diverse businesses with bulky brick buildings housing offices, manufacturing facilities, distributorships and warehouses. Today, those once-empty buildings have become a hot bed of local entrepreneurs with specialty shops, restaurants, apartments, condos and craft brewers.

On the evening of Jan. 12, 2016, Trinity UMC hosted its first Pub Theology gathering at Ardent Craft Ales in Scott's Addition. A diverse group of 21 people from our congregation attended that first meeting.

After a session of fel-

lowship, Pastor Lenow gathered us for a modern-day version of the Good Samaritan. Then we broke into small groups for discussion related to the Bible story with instructions to be prepared to share our thoughts and observations with the whole group.

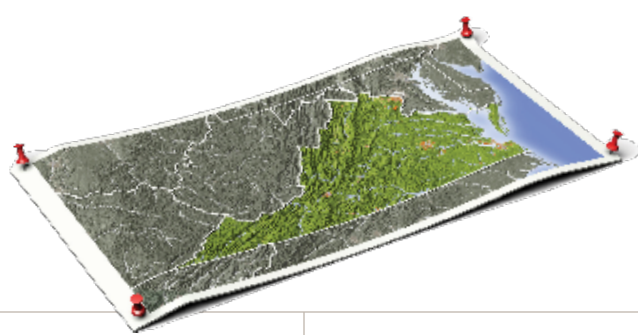
Overall, we were pleased with our first Pub Theology session, and we have scheduled a second gathering. It was interesting to note the curiosity that other patrons in the tasting room had about our gathering. Going forward, we're hoping that our hospitality can embrace the curious onlookers and engage them into our Pub Theology discussions. 🍷

— Bill Pike is director of Operations at Trinity UMC in Richmond.



Stock photo.

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Tommy Crosby named executive director of Camp Overlook

By Kelli Sprague

Overlook Retreat and Camp Ministries in Keezletown has served the churches of the Winchester, Harrisonburg and Staunton Districts for 50 years. This anniversary year has been one of remembrance, honor and celebration as the camp has looked back on its founders, given thanks for their vision and marveled at how God has grown Overlook into what it is today.

It has also been a time of transition as the camp moves forward to the next 50 years of ministry. One big change is the retirement of current Executive Director Ron Robey. Robey

has served the camp for 37 years and has faithfully developed programming and the facilities to continue the dream of the men and women who worked to make Camp Overlook a reality. The camp's staff and supporters are grateful for his leadership and have been blessed by his passion for ministry.

On April 1, 2016, Robey will pass the torch to his successor, the Rev. Tommy Crosby who already has a history with the camp.


"Overlook is a place where I have been formed as a child of God," Crosby said. I can walk into Glover Chapel and point to the spot where I sat at eight or nine years old and came to know in my heart how much God loved me. I can go to the spot where I answered my call to ministry after working on the summer staff for a couple of years as well as the place I proposed to my wife. Over-

look has been a big part of my life for more than 20 years," said Crosby.

Serving in the local church for 10 years, Crosby hopes to bring his leadership skills to the position and acknowledges the leadership of his predecessor.

"Ron has created formative Christian experiences for many years and has impacted countless lives," said Crosby. "I pray to continue this work and at the same time move it forward into our current context. I will stay true to what makes Overlook unique while exploring new ideas."

For Crosby, the camp is the extension of the local church.

"I want the things we do on the mountain to have a direct impact on what the church accomplishes in their communities. I also want to explore how Overlook can be in mission to our community and develop new partnerships to serve God's kingdom," said Crosby. "Overlook was founded 50 years ago to be a place for children to have a Christian camp experience. I hope to see this mission continue for another 50 years providing transformational experiences for all God's children for the glory of God's Kingdom," Crosby said. 

— Kelli Sprague is assistant director of Camp Overlook.

Tommy Crosby, his wife Alison
and their children.
Photo courtesy of Kelli Sprague.





The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

By Linda S. Rhodes

On Wednesday, Feb. 24, a deadly storm system spawned multiple tornadoes that swept from southern Virginia across the state and into the Northern Neck. In Waverly, two houses and a mobile home were completely destroyed. Three people — two men and a two-year-old child — were killed. In Tappahannock, at least 50 structures were damaged.

In Appomattox, more than 50 structures were destroyed and more than 100 were damaged. Evergreen UMC sustained significant damage to its roof, and teams were called in immediately to install tarps and strengthen the structure to prevent further damage.

Within hours after the storms struck, Virginia Conference Early Response Teams (ERT) were called into action under the direction of the Rev. Bob Pihlcrantz, Virginia Conference Disaster Response coordinator, and the Rev. Kirk Culpepper, Virginia Conference ERT coordinator.

Most ERT volunteers completed their tasks

Long-term recovery begins for survivors of Virginia Feb. 24 tornadoes

within a week after the storms. Communities in Appomattox (Farmville District) and Rappahannock and Tappahannock in Essex County (Fredericksburg District) are ending the relief phase of disaster response and now getting ready to start transition to long-term recovery.

The focus is to establish a list of potential United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) teams that can begin long-term recovery work this spring.

But Pihlcrantz said a lot of work will need to be done between now and then. "Just because we are not deploying teams right now," he said, "doesn't mean we aren't working. We are getting ready for the long haul. This is not a sprint, it is a marathon and based upon current information, it is probably a two- to three-year recovery process."

The decision to move into long-term recovery drives other issues, Pihlcrantz said. "First, the conference disaster plan calls for hiring a Long-Term Recovery Manager, Construction Manager and a Case Manager," he said. "Funding for these positions would be made by applying for an initial grant from UMCOR for \$100,000

as soon as possible. In addition, we must start the grant process for asking UMCOR for grant monies for rebuild projects."

Pihlcrantz emphasized the importance of raising funds within the conference to help with immediate needs. "It's donations we receive from churches in the Virginia Conference that will get the recovery projects started," he said.

Pihlcrantz noted that the Virginia Conference has not experienced a disaster of this magnitude requiring

long-term recovery since Hurricane Floyd devastated Franklin in 1999.

"I will be asking for training assistance from UMCOR," Pihlcrantz said, "and for the North Carolina Conference Disaster Response Team to come to Virginia to assist us in setting up our recovery operation. This is a great example of our connection at work."

"Please also continue to pray, pray and then pray again," Pihlcrantz said.

(Continued on page 25: "Tornado")

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A DAY IN THE LIFE



Exclusive content for this article available to online subscribers.

Joanna Dietz meets attendees of Braddock Street UMC's Monday night dinner. Photos by Nick Ruxton.

By Madeline Pillow

Before she even tells us that Monday nights are her favorite night of the week at Braddock Street UMC, you can see it on her face.

Joanna Dietz is a deacon and minister of Mission and Service at the church in the middle of Winchester. It's a position that takes her an hour and 10 minutes to get to everyday, but it's a commute that doesn't bother her.

"I have an hour-and 10-minute commute every day to and every day home from," she said, "and I love that it does not bother me at all that I have that commute. I just love being here."

Her position is rare to find in many places in Virginia. It's being done by lay people at Floris UMC in the

Arlington District and at a few other locations in the conference.

Before Nick Ruxton, conference videographer, and I traveled to Winchester to see what a typical day was like in her ministry in Winchester, I had to sell her on the idea, which wasn't a particularly hard sell at all. She loves the idea of the conference seeing what individuals are doing in ministry, especially deacons, a position which is sometimes hard for people to understand.

"One of the unique and beautiful aspects of being a deacon is how we connect out in the world while connected to the church," Dietz said. "And each deacon does this in a different way."

We walk with her on the downtown Walking Mall of Winchester to see

where the church is working and their community partners. On the way, we meet Shorty, a man Joanna met not long after starting the job. They both greet each other and ask how the other is doing. She then runs into a group of people whom she invites to that night's dinner, reminding them of the time and place, 6 p.m. at Braddock Street, and the menu, hot dogs.

Downtown we see the Our Health buildings, just one of the many organizations Braddock Street UMC is working with.

Monday night dinners

At 5:30 p.m. that Monday night, we gather with Joanna outside the church, greeting those waiting for dinner. Joanna tells us that all different types of people attend: church members, homeless people and elderly folks wanting companionship over dinner. The number of people can vary anywhere from 60 to more than 120, which determines whether or not there are second helpings.

Signs on the windows of the first floor entrance to Braddock Street UMC tell dinner attendees not to start gathering until 5:30 p.m. But in our walk back to the church, we see the crowd gathering early.

The rule is there because a number of scuffles





A DAY IN THE LIFE

Dietz talks with attendees at Braddock Street UMC's Monday night dinner.



and altercations have taken place, bringing police to the church. That's when Joanna started going out to greet people. Some church members expressed concern, but Joanna felt it was important for her to do so.

"I'm the safest person out there. There has not been one fight outside since I have gone outside with them," Joanna said. "Not one. Because relationship has been formed and they know what the rules and expectations are and they don't want to break that trust that we've built over the time that we've had together."

One of the many connections she has made is with a lady named Joyce. With a teal puffy jacket and a hat fitting snugly on her head with little Minnie Mouse ears on top, Joyce is the first to greet Joanna as

she walks outside into the crowd of people.

Joyce talks to Joanna about her cat that just died and is eager to get a picture with Joanna. There is relationship for Joyce in this place. When I ask her how long she had been coming to Monday night dinners, she talks about the community.

"This is my church," she says.

At 6 p.m., Joanna invites the crowd upstairs after giving them some instructions about how the tables are setup a little bit differently — two of the regular five tables are being cordoned off for an event later on.

Dinner is served buffet style, and attendees sit down and talk to one another. Some church members mingle with members of the community; some

will attend a poverty group meeting after dinner.

It is a time for conversation and relationship. But even for Joanna, who has worked in poverty before, this experience was a bit daunting at first.

"Coming into a room with between 60 to over 120 people that you don't know," she said, "who are strangers and you know there's a huge social divide between you and them is intimidating. For the first three months, I would walk up for a conversation and sit down and have no idea what I was saying."

But it's all about taking steps into the uncomfortable, she says. "Taking those steps out and sitting down at the table, breaking the ice, going there and not just the first night — because the first night is still scary. It's the second

and third and fourth, forcing yourself to be uncomfortable until you are finally comfortable in that situation."

Minister of Mission and Service

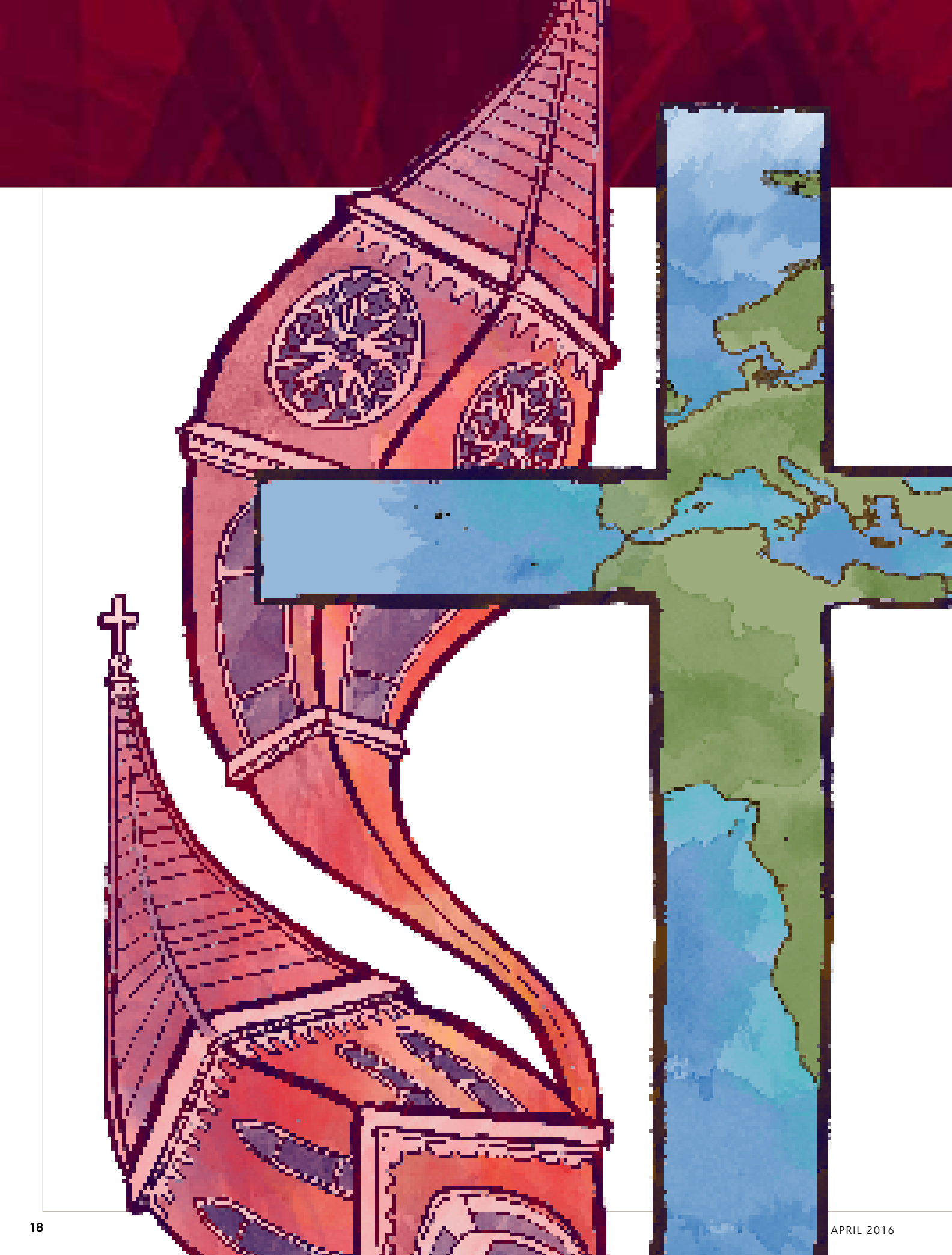
One of Joanna's tasks in this position is what she calls the "thin places" in the community which began by first understanding the Braddock Street congregation in her first month and learning about the UMW, mission committees and the opportunities. She turned her attention the next month to other churches in the area and their pastors and mission coordinators.

This was important, Joanna says, because Winchester District churches are close not only in proximity but also in relationship.

"When we see a need, we don't attempt to address it by ourselves, we bring it to the whole church community to see how we can make a difference," she said. "I think a lot of times churches try to do it on their own, and that's not how things are done in Winchester. We can only accomplish so much on our own."

In her third month, she met with community partners like Evans Home and Our Health and got to

(Continued on pg 25: "Day")



"DEACONS SERVE IN THE SPACE BETWEEN CHURCH AND THE WORLD."

– The United Methodist Deacon, Margaret Ann Crain



UNITED METHODIST
ORDER OF
DEACON
20TH ANNIVERSARY

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Order of Deacon. According to the Book of Discipline, "Deacons are persons called by God, authorized by the Church, and ordained by a bishop to a life-time ministry of Word, Service, Compassion, and Justice, to both the community and the congregation in a ministry that connects the two." (§1329.1).

Deacons are the bridge between the church and world. Known as an order for being on the margins, they have the ability to remind the church of its mission and to bring out the gifts within their churches. They do this by leading and equipping the people of God through Word, service or diaconia, compassion and justice. As Margaret Ann Crain says in her book, *The United Methodist Deacon*, "Their work is focused on convincing the world of the reality of the gospel. When they succeed, The UMC is stronger and more vital."

Deacons' call to diaconia is the service that Jesus modeled when he fed the five thousand, welcomed the children, taught the Scriptures, healed the sick and released those who were captive to oppressions of one kind or another (*The United Methodist Deacon*).

Read on to discover more about the deacon order, its history and how deacons work within the Virginia Conference.

WAIT. WHAT

By Jason Stanley

A group of church leaders had gathered for a meeting. The district superintendant mentioned the possibility of hiring a deacon to help the congregation reach beyond the church walls. A woman sitting across the table looked back at the DS with a quizzical expression. “Wait,” she said, “What’s a deacon?”

It’s not the first time that question has been asked. For 20 years, The United Methodist Church has been struggling to articulate the answer to “What’s a deacon?”

I welcome these questions. When I first experienced my call to ministry and I was told about the ministry of the deacon, that was my response. I had never heard of an ordained deacon. While I felt a strong call to ordained ministry, it did not look like the pastor of a church. But I had no words to express what it did look like.

I felt called to be with those whom society had turned away. I felt a call to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned. The call I was experiencing was to something beyond the church walls.

My mentor at the time, the Rev. Mary Sue Swann, and I spent a lot of time discussing this. She recommended to me the book *A Deacon’s Heart*. It would be a year before I would read the book. Once I did, the words of Margaret Ann Crain and Jack Seymour were telling me who I was in a way I had never experienced. I finished the book and knew that I was a deacon. These words affirmed my call to ordained ministry as a servant leader in the life of the church, being a bridge between the Word and the world and connecting the needs of the world to the resources of the church.

Mary Sue showed me that the image of clergy that I had — the solo pastor who preached every Sunday and “ran” the church — was not the only image the church had of clergy. I learned that I have a deacon’s heart, longing for the healing of creation, plus mutual and connecting ministries that reach the poor and the hungry, the sick and the imprisoned, the lost and the lonely.

**THE QUESTION IS NOT “WHAT IS A DEACON?”
RATHER, “WHO IS A DEACON?”**

The Order of Deacon is a permanent order of persons ordained to a lifetime of ministry of Word, Service, Compassion and Justice, drawing on a long tradition of deacons in the church. The earliest deacons were Stephen and the seven in Acts 6 who are commissioned to see to the needs of those in the community who were without.

The Rev. Margaret Ann Crain, an ordained deacon and professor of Christian Education at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, writes in her book *The United Methodist Deacon*, “The identity of a deacon, fundamentally, is that of one who has experienced a call to lead ministries of compassion and justice. Deacons are passionate about the particular area of service to which they are called. They seek to lead and equip the church for that service.”¹

Whether the deacon is serving in the local church or outside the church, the deacon equips, empowers and encourages the church in going beyond its own walls to connect the church to the world. They help the community identify its needs and the church to identify the resources it has to meet those needs.

This connecting effort is done in partnership with the elder and the laity. Even if a deacon’s primary appointment is outside the church, he or she has a secondary appointment in a local church. One of the ways in which this connection is made is through the worship leadership of the deacon. In assisting the elder in administering the sacraments, the deacon models what this connection looks like.

The work of the deacon is grounded in compassion and justice. It is more than just a Band-Aid fix for a problem. It is working with others to seek long-lasting solutions to racism, poverty, hunger, etc. A deacon whose work is centered around the compassionate care of children, for example, is also concerned with advocating for the rights of children. To show compassion is to offer hope and love to the marginalized among us. To show justice is to call attention to injustices in our society and world. This can be done through teaching and preaching, hands-on service, telling the stories of those on the margins and advocating for justice.

The ministry of the deacon calls to mind the compassionate and just acts of Jesus. From touching the lepers to heal them, to washing the disciples’ dirty, dusty feet, Jesus’ acts exemplified what servant leadership looks like. The deacon is called to extend those acts to the least of these among us; to extend the Table of hospitality and reconciliation in a way that builds community within our communities. 🍏

— The Rev. Jason Stanley is an ordained deacon and associate pastor at Peakland, UMC, Lynchburg District.

¹ Crain, Margaret Ann. *The United Methodist Deacon: Ordained to Word, Service, Compassion, and Justice*. Abingdon Press, 2014, page 15.

S A DEACON?



The Rev. Roger Dowdy refers to his call to ministry as a “nudge” he received as a child. Photo by Matt Brodie.

ONE OF THE FIRST DEACONS SHARES HIS STORY

The Rev. Roger Dowdy was one of the first members of the United Methodist Order of Deacon. He was present at General Conference in 1996 when the Order of Deacon was approved and was one of the Virginia Conference diaconal ministers who became a deacon when the Order was created the following year.

He spent the next 15 years defining his role as a deacon.

Today, he is retired, but still serves as director of CROSS-PATHS Ministries — a field-based, ecumenical ministry service that he founded to strengthen the worship, spiritual life and leadership of the church.

CALL TO MINISTRY

He remembers his call to ministry as a “nudge” that began when he was a very young child.

“I knew music would be part of my life,” he said. “I grew up in a church musical family. My mother’s side of the family was very large with four sisters and two brothers. Everyone, all six of them, sang in the choir. Three of them were choir directors; one was an organist. So music was sort of

in the family DNA. When we all got together, we would sing — all 40 of us — it was amazing.”

He grew up near the campus of Lynchburg College and went to Euclid Christian Church where many of the faculty attended. “So I grew up in this pastoral academic world of thought that combined with the call to music,” he said.

He credits Rachel Wilson, Christian educator in his church, with nurturing his calling to full-time church service.

“Either my sophomore or junior year, she asked if I would be interested in pursuing a vocational conversation for about six weeks,” he said. “Though music was a great deal of my life, this was a way to explore a lot of different kinds of nudges. It was one-on-one with her for about six weeks. Every meeting was always some new aspect of looking at gifts and calls. She actually took me to places for visits: a social worker’s office and even an architect (at the time I was interested in architecture), and then we’d come back and talk about the meetings.”

(Continued on next page: “Deacon”)

("Deacon," continued from pg. 21)

BECAME "METHODIZED"

He became a Methodist when he was studying organ at Fort Hill Methodist Church in Lynchburg.

"It was just supposed to be a summer job as I had already been accepted at Northwestern," Dowdy remembers. "But by the end of the summer, they didn't want me to leave and I didn't want to leave either. I never dreamed I would work there. Bill Vaughn and A.G. Jefferson were huge figures in the church and were always elected to General Conference. I was instantly 'Methodized' because of the great leadership in that church."

At Fort Hill, he was nurtured into diaconal ministry, which was what was available at that time.

He had never heard of an Annual Conference. While he was at Fort Hill, he was invited to go to Annual Conference since it was in Roanoke, only a short distance away. "I decided to go for the day," Dowdy said, "and I was overwhelmed by the music and singing."

When a director got sick before Annual Conference the next year, Dowdy was asked to lead music and worship. He did so for the Virginia Annual Conference for the next 20 years.

Around 1984, the Lynchburg District superintendent at the time was trying to merge a church that had burned down and another church that was struggling. The two congregations united to form Heritage UMC with 28 acres of land on the fringe of Lynchburg. The Rev. Tom Joyce was appointed pastor.

"Tom was appointed, and he called me to consult about music, which is something I was doing," Dowdy said. "The church had decided that worship and music would be an identifying mark, and he asked me to come and meet with them. So for about six months, we brainstormed and dreamed about the facility."

"In those conversations, we talked about the mission of the church and how worship nurtures the mission," Dowdy said. "Every church, every congregation has its own system and personality. In doing this, we could nurture who they would become. At that time, they hadn't even thought they could have a full-time minister of music, but they got excited and I wrote the job description. Then I applied and was at Heritage for 12 years."

START OF SOMETHING NEW

After his long-tenured service at Fort Hill and Heritage, Dowdy "felt a pull to be an itinerant."

He said as he traveled around the conference, he noticed that "it was almost decadent" to work with a relatively large congregation with many individuals and resources to draw from as he had been able to do at Fort Hill and Heritage. He felt a need to do something to help smaller, rural churches.

In 1997, the same year the Order of Deacon began, Dowdy established CROSS-PATHS Ministries to offer leadership training, coaching in music and worship and consulting for church visioning and discipleship.

CROSS-PATHS periodically offers Schools of Global Song to aid leaders of music and worship in developing skills in leading global music and worship, as well as The Academy of Pastoral Musicians to provide opportunities to nurture the soul and spirituality of those who lead music and worship.


Dowdy is author/editor of *Worship Music Today: Caught in the Whirlwind of Change*, and *Standing at the Door* — Millennial Worship Resources. He is a leader for Making Disciples in the 21st Century, an initiative of United Methodist Discipleship Ministries that seeks to reach, initiate and form new Christians in the faith. In addition, he has served as training leader and reader/consultant for both the United Methodist Hymnal (1988) and the 2001 hymnal supplement, *The Faith We Sing*.

Dowdy has held adjunct and visiting instructor positions in Worship and Church Music at Emory University, Candler School of Theology, Atlanta, Ga.; Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.; and Lynchburg College, Lynchburg, Va. From 1998-2005, he served as adjunct faculty in worship and music to the Southeastern Jurisdiction's Lay Ministry Center at Lake Junaluska, N.C. Since 2006, he has served under appointment to Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center as director of Ministry and Event Development.

THE JOURNEY REMAINS

"My ministry remains to be a part of a call and identity of church congregations that can then get nurtured through worship and arts," he said.

And he's still trying to explain what it means to be a deacon.

"Even after General Conference 1996 and the formation of the deacon order, there's a mystery and confusion to so many people even now about deacons," he said. 

ARTS AND MISSION CAMP EXPRESSES ROLE OF THE DEACON

By Laura Douglass and Courtney Joyner

DEACONS:
CREATE
RELATE
CONNECT
RESTORE
CELEBRATE



Inspiration for the Asbury UMC Arts & Mission Camp grew out the five points above and as an expression of the deacon's role to bridge the church to the world. During the final week before school begins in August, many summer activities such as day camps, recreation programs and family vacations have come to an end. This is where Arts & Mission Camp steps in.


The leadership team consisting of two deacons and a deaconess — the Rev. Laura Douglass, the Rev. Courtney Joyner and deaconess Olma Garibay May — along with numerous volunteers from several congregations, has for the past five years used this week as a time to reach out both to those within the church and to those on the margins of the community. Using the Society of St. Andrew (SOSA) VBS curriculum, the week combines the SOSA Bible lesson, mission activities, arts and crafts, singing, instruments,

healthful snacks and recreation.

Over the years, participants have included many from the international refugee community, several behaviorally-challenged children connected through social service agencies, as well as those from the churches represented by the leadership. The camp is underwritten by Asbury UMC's music ministry and The Asbury Sacred Arts Series with optional donations welcomed.

One of the highlights of the week is a fieldtrip to the Harrisonburg Farmer's Market near the church where SOSA "gleaners" gather food from vendors on Tuesdays and Saturdays and where the children choose fresh vegetables and fruits for their snacks.

On the final day, time is set aside to bring offerings of coins gleaned by the children during the week to benefit SOSA. We conclude every year with a celebration with families and friends. The children perform music they have learned and showcase their arts and crafts. Finally, we all sit down for a meal — usually a potato bar, but with the addition of children from other cultures, the buffet has grown to include dishes from around the world.

Our prayer each year is that children may experience the love of Christ through art and music, recognizing God in all of our creative expressions of life. 

— The Rev. Laura Douglass is minister of Music at Asbury UMC, Harrisonburg District. The Rev. Courtney Joyner is minister of Worship Arts and Music at St. Paul's UMC in Staunton.



Campers fill bean soup baggies to learn hunger awareness.

THE CALL TO SERVE



Joe Torrence and friend Julie Kidd at an event for United Methodist Family Services of Virginia (UMFS).

By Joe Torrence

The summer between my 9th and 10th grade in high school, I went on my first mission trip to Mingo County, W.Va., through Appalachian Service Project. I decided to go because Whitney was going and she was really cute. During that week I experienced poverty, oppression and hopelessness in ways I had never experienced. These folks lived in conditions that I could not believe and that I still vividly remember today.

The kids were dirty and the “house” was anything but safe and dry. During that week of working with this family I really got to know them. I learned their story: how their dad had passed away a few months earlier from black lung; he was 32. I learned how the mom wanted to work but there was no one to care for the babies, so she had tough choices to make.

In the midst of this week my motivation for being there changed. It shifted from Whitney to something different, something bigger and something more important. I saw a bunch of teenagers, with the help of this family, help make this home safe, warm and dry. I saw hope and light where there was once darkness. I saw the need for change. While holding some new shingles we were putting on the roof, I discovered God was present and calling me into a deeper understanding of the Creator and, more importantly, a life transforming relationship. So it was on a roof in the middle

of Mingo County, W.Va., that I gave my life to Christ and experienced a call to make right the injustices this family had experienced. I felt how students could be the voice of change for the world and the church. My call to serve began right there on that roof. (Thanks, Whitney, for being cute, and thank you, Lord, for working in ways that I could not fathom!)

The call to serve outside of the church walls has always been a part of my ministry. Even serving as a youth minister in the local church, there has always been a sense that being “out” in the world was important and even vital to my faith journey. So often we focus on the church as being the gathered community inside the walls of our building but, in my experience, the purest forms of church are the gathered community outside the walls. There is something powerful about people being in mission and relationship together working toward a common goal that is bigger than they are. It is building that collective community and partnerships that has always drawn me in.

Building relationships and sharing God’s good news in the world are why I wake up every morning. As author Rob Bell says in *A Life Worth Living*, “The Japanese have a word for what gets you out of bed in the morning: they call it your *ikigai*. Your *ikigai* is that sense you have when you wake up that this day matters, that there are new experiences to be had, that you have work to do, a contribution to make. Sometimes this is referred to as your calling, other times your vocation, your destiny, your path. Your *ikigai* is your reason for being.” The reason I get out of bed is to help form and be part of this relational community that is ushering in God’s Kingdom. It is what I was made to do. It is just part of who I am and the way I am wired.

I GET TO BE THE CHURCH FOR THOSE WHO MAY NEED IT THE MOST.

But there are hard days. The kids we serve at United Methodist Family Services of Virginia (UMFS) have experienced parts of life that I cannot imagine. The people who were to take care of them are the very ones who have hurt them. There are times when I hear, “@%^\$ you and Your God” or “If God loved me why was I...” and those questions are really difficult to hear and answer.

It is exactly in those broken places we are called to be. Jesus is clear that his Good News is for the least, the lost, the broken. So that is what my ministry at UMFS looks like.

(Continued on pg 27: “Serve”)



A DAY IN THE LIFE

("DAY," continued from pg 17)

know each individual and what they do.

Through this effort, Joanna was able to begin piecing together all the people who were involved and wanted to make a difference in Winchester and could start the connections and conversations needed to address the "thin places" in the community.

Her position in the community is as a conversation starter and, for many other different churches, a liaison to the community and community partners who often come to her about what they can do. This is also true of the members of Braddock Street.

A retired social worker at the church recently came to Joanna asking how she could use her gifts in ministry. Joanna was able to connect her with a child safety center that was in need.

"As a deacon this position really does fill out all the ways that I am called," Joanna said. "A deacon is called to service, worship, to compassion and to justice. We live into that by equipping the laity to go into their call for themselves. A lot of times people come to me and they know they want to serve, they just don't know how."

Winchester's "thin places"

The "thin places" in Winchester are very clearly homelessness, mental illness and addiction. Joanna sees them as interconnected issues.

"Homelessness comes because of mental illness and addiction," she said. "Right now, the dialogue is how do we come together as a community to address that as we are seeing what those needs are. We have a coalition that is really focused on the addiction aspect. Heroin is huge in Winchester. It's beginning to bring all those groups together by having this conversation."

Joanna is the first to point out that the church was already heavily in mission before she arrived.

"Braddock Street is filled with phenomenal volunteers. That is not something they needed help with. Things are working all by themselves. Going into the community has been the biggest piece in growing our mission. Someone to go out into the community was the piece we were missing the most — what's out there and where do we need to be?"

Relationship building is key to what Braddock Street does and how Joanna is effective in her

position.

"Being able to walk down the street and know people's names and coming up and giving hugs and hearing how their day has been," she said, "that's been a huge aspect of what we have been doing."


Renewed call to ministry

Struggling with her call after being in music ministry for 20 years, Joanna applied for the position, but was unsure if it was right for her — until the interview process.

"Every question they asked me," she said, "instead of leading me to an answer, led me to a story of a way that I had already been involved in mission and had been living out my call as a deacon. It was

like all the pieces came together. And it clicked, this is my new home and where I am called to be."

In the community and on the streets of Winchester, Joanna's call is something she is learning how to live into and the type of ministry she feels God is calling her to.


"It's really interesting as clergy," she said, "that God continues to equip us and lead us in the ways we need to go in our journeys. Just because we become clergy doesn't mean the journey is over, it continues on." 

— Madeline Pillow is editor of the Advocate.

("TORNADO," continued from pg 15)

"Your conference team and all the ERTs are volunteers. There has been and will continue to be extreme self-sacrifice in order to help our communities heal from these tragic events. We are in mission and ministry, the hands and feet of Christ."

Funds are needed to help coordinate preparation, response and recovery in the conference during times of disaster — including providing personnel needed, equipment required and Christian witness that is desired in such situations.

To contribute to Virginia Conference disaster response and recovery efforts, you can make a gift through your local church. Or, make your check payable to "Virginia United Methodist Conference" and send it to the **Virginia Conference Treasurer, P.O. Box 5605, Glen Allen, VA 23058**. Designate "Conference Advance #5037 — Disaster Response" on your check or apportionment statement. 

— Linda S. Rhodes is Virginia Conference director of Communications.

EVENTS



April

Conference-wide Day of Prayer for General Conference

April 10, Across the Virginia Conference

The United Methodist Council of Bishops invited each annual conference in the denomination to designate one day to hold a 24-hour prayer vigil for General Conference. Bishop Young Jin Cho selected Sunday, April 10, to be the day for the Virginia Conference prayer vigil. District offices will coordinate the scheduling of local churches that wish to participate. Organizers are asking districts to encourage all congregations on the district to sign up for half-hour or one-hour increments so there will be 24 hours of continuous prayer beginning at 12 a.m. April 10 and continuing until 12 a.m. April 11. The chapel in the Virginia United Methodist Center in Glen Allen will be open for prayer. All congregations are asked to include the prayer initiative in their Sunday services on that day.

Ethics 102: Clergy Reporting of Child Abuse & Neglect Training

April 18, Virginia Crossings Wyndham Hotel & Conference Center, Glen Allen

For newly appointed clergy and interested church professionals, this event meets the requirement of mandatory sexual ethics training for the Virginia Conference. Registration for this event is required 48 hours prior to the event to ensure sufficient materials are available for all participants. For more information, contact the Center for Clergy Excellence at (804) 521-1126 or 1-800-768-6040, ext. 126; e-mail ClergyExcellence@vaumc.org.

Ministers' Convocation

April 18-20, Virginia Crossings Wyndham Hotel & Conference Center, Glen Allen
2016 Ministers' Convocation, "Come to the Table: Bringing Food and Faith Together," will be held April 18-20 at Virginia Crossings Wyndham Hotel & Conference Center, 1000 Virginia Center Parkway, Glen Allen. This will be a time of Sabbath retreat, fellowship of ministry leaders, engagement in theological and academic conversation and a time to be re-inspired for ministry. All clergy, diaconal ministers and professional/paraprofessional certified ministers in the Virginia Conference are invited. For more information or to register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date.

Clergy Ethics II Training – Roanoke District

April 21, Thrasher Memorial UMC, Vinton

All clergy and church professionals are required to attend an Ethics II Training event in the current quadrennium (2012-2016). Registration is required 48 hours prior to the event in order to ensure sufficient materials are available for all participants. Refunds will not be processed once registration closes 48 hours prior to the event. For more information or to register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. If you do not have a credit card to register online, e-mail Kristen Seibert in the Center for Clergy Excellence at kristenseibert@vaumc.org. For more information, contact the Center for Clergy Excellence at (804) 521-1126 or 1-800-768-6040, ext. 126.

May

General Conference

May 10-20, Oregon Convention Center, Portland, OR

UMVIM Team Leader Recertification

May 6, St. Mark's UMC, Richmond District

Team Leader Recertification is required for all United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) team leaders who completed basic team leader training 5 years ago or longer. The focus of this training is to update leaders on Virginia Conference UMVIM policies and guidelines, to share best practices and to answer questions. Five participants needed to offer this training. There is a \$25 registration fee for each participant, payable when you register. This fee does not cover an optional team leader handbook, which will be available for purchase (\$20) at the training, or the new *A Mission Journey* book, which is available through Cokesbury. A meal will NOT be provided. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. For more information, contact Forrest White, Virginia Conference UMVIM coordinator, at (804) 938-1026 or VirginiaUMVIM@gmail.com. To register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date.

UMVIM Team Leader Training

May 7, St. Mark's UMC, Richmond District

Virginia Conference United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) Team Leader Training will be held Saturday, May 7, at St. Mark's UMC, 11551 Lucks Ln., Midlothian. Training will begin promptly at 9:30 a.m. and end at 3 p.m. Doors open at 9 a.m. Team Leader Training is required for all first-time team leaders, but all interested persons are welcome to attend whether leading a team or not. All participants must pre-register by noon Monday before the training event. There is a \$55 registration fee for each participant. For more information, contact Forrest White, conference UMVIM coordinator, at (804) 938-1026 or VirginiaUMVIM@gmail.com.

EVENTS

Virginia PAUMCS Retreat

May 15-16, Camp Overlook, Keezletown

Dr. Sandy Gramling, associate professor in Clinical Psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University where she teaches "Stress and Its Management," will help PAUMCS retreat participants learn how they can stay centered in Christ while meeting the needs of congregations and community members. Held at Camp Overlook in Keezletown, this event is an opportunity for church secretaries and administrators to learn, network, fellowship and relax. Breakfast and lunch on Monday are included in the cost of registration. The fee for this event is \$88 for PAUMCS members; \$98 for non-members. Register online at www.vaumc.org/PAUMCS by May 2.

Five-Day Academy for Spiritual Formation

May 22-27, Roslyn Retreat Center, Richmond

The rescheduled Virginia Five-Day Academy for Spiritual Formation will be held at the Roslyn Retreat Center, Richmond, May 22-27. Registration is currently full, but to be placed on a waiting list, contact Dot Ivey, Registrar, at dotcivey@gmail.com.

June

UMVIM Team Leader Training

June 4, Franktown UMC, Franktown

Virginia Conference United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) Team Leader Training will be held on Saturday, June 4, at Franktown UMC, 7551 Bay-side Rd, Franktown. Training will begin promptly at 9:30 a.m. and end at 3:30 p.m. Doors open at 9 a.m. Team Leader Training is required for all first-time team leaders, but all interested persons are welcome to attend whether leading a team or not. All participants must

pre-register by noon Monday before the training event. There is a \$55 registration fee for each participant. For more information, contact Forrest White, conference UMVIM coordinator, at (804) 938-1026 or VirginiaUMVIM@gmail.com.

Annual Conference

June 17-19, Berglund Center, Roanoke

Helping Hands for Children

June 22-23, Saint Paul's UMC, Staunton

This two-day mission experience for children is offered to all member churches of the Virginia Conference. Rising 4th through 6th graders, parents and adult leaders can come and learn about mission opportunities and the importance of being a caring Christian. Cost is \$36 per person. This includes t-shirt, meals, snacks and overnight stay. Complete registration form by May 30 on the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. For more information, contact Beth Christian at BethChristian@vaumc.org.

Harambee!


June 24-28, Rust College, Holly Springs, Mississippi

For rising 7th graders through 2015 high school graduates (ages 12-18) and adult workers with youth, this is a youth conference planned by the HARAMBEE planning committee under the guidance of the executive board of the Southeastern Jurisdiction Black Methodists for Church Renewal, Inc. The conference is held annually to help youths develop spiritual, leadership and interpersonal skills. Come to work, pray, sing and build meaningful relationships with God and each other. Speaker will be the Rev. Jerome Scales Jr., pastor of Spirit Of Truth UMC in Mason, Tenn. Registration ends June 2. All necessary paperwork is on the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. Refer any questions to the Rev. Constance Nelson Barnes, RegistrarHarambee@yahoo.com.

("SERVE," continued from pg. 24)

UMFS helps take the shattered pieces of a young person's life and turn those broken pieces into a beautiful mosaic of transformational love.

We form a beautiful community on a journey all trying to find the things that make our lives about something more. I have the privilege of connecting to these young people and walking alongside them in this journey. The really cool part is that I am connecting our church to this incredible mission, too. The church is part of the work we are doing because the church is supporting our mission. The church supports us by prayers, presence and gifts. I could not do what I do without the support of the church.

By extension, I get to be the church for those who may need it the most. We are calling these young people into a deeper understanding of the God who loves without bound and without condition. It is truly life-changing and life-giving work that I have been set apart to do. Join me in this adventure as we discover together what makes this day matter and how we might live into our understanding of being church more deeply for those who need it the most. 

— The Rev. Joe Torrence is minister to Youth and Church Relations at UMFS.

DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



Chestnut Memorial United Methodist Church, Newport News, held Scout Sunday on Feb. 14. The church presented Gary Coverston and Loren Zehr the Cross and Flame Award; Tim Ewing the Building Faith in Youth Award; Richard Barnes the United Methodist God and Service Award; and Pastor Robert M. Chapman the Shepherd Church Charter Recognition Award and the Conference Bishop Award for outstanding service to youths in The United Methodist Church. The charter of Troop/Pack 11 was also presented to Pastor Robert M. Chapman. The church has chartered Troop 11 for 82 years.



Centennial committee chairman George Birdsong watches in the sanctuary as workers begin to reassemble the organ at **Main Street United Methodist Church, Suffolk.** The building and sanctuary have undergone a major renovation in the last five months, and members have worshiped in the atrium during the

interim. On Feb. 28, they returned to the sanctuary with sounds of joy and ringing bells. June 2016 will mark 100 years since the 215-year-old congregation first worshipped in the current building.

In Oct. 2015, a missionary team led by Walter A. Whitehurst and Ed Sievers was sponsored by **Charity UMC, Virginia Beach,** to travel to Carahue, Chile, where Whitehurst knew Pedro Grandon, a pastor who had a church badly in need of repair and four active members ripe for evangelism. The team made a major contribution in repairs to a church building, provided a Vacation Bible School for children led by Mariluz Sommer from California with the help of Holly Veber of Charity UMC and Mary Woodcock of North Carolina.

Dr. Charles O'Dea, a chiroprac-

tor from Suffolk, provided treatments for at least 175 patients. It was announced on the local radio station that persons could receive treatments at the church. Many people came, especially from the rural areas.

The Rev. LeRoy Jones, a General Evangelist from Chatham, taught an adult Sunday school class while team members participated with the children's class in the fellowship hall. He preached for several worship services, a Women's Society meeting and spoke for 15 different classes in a public school, each time bringing a different message depending on the age levels of the students. Of the 600 students in the school, 171 students and one teacher raised their hands dedicating or rededicating their lives to the Lord. In each of the worship services many also did the same, so that more than 200 persons made a commitment to the Lord. The team also provided a music ministry throughout the duration of the trip.

Other members of the team were the Rev. David Whitehurst, Alison Martin, Jeff Cutler, Don Heeringa, Don Nelson and Paul Steele.

Pictured are the team with Mapuche girls who are students at a rural Methodist school.





EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY

Adapt your leadership style to motivate your team

By Clay Morgan

Do you focus more on tasks or people? Are you assertive or responsive? Do you wear your emotions on your sleeve or maintain a poker face to hide your feelings from all but your closest loved ones? The answers to these questions reveal important things about your personality, how you interact with others and what it will take to motivate and create balance among team members.

For more than half a century, personal social styles have been used in the business world. Knowing when to use each style can help leaders better connect with people and maximize positive outcomes. Church leaders can also benefit from understanding the four primary social styles.

Drivers

Drivers like to get to the bottom line and prioritize results. They often speak forcefully, hold strong positions and need to be in charge. Assertive and task-oriented, drivers often move at a fast pace and may be less responsive to others. These people act quickly and decisively and don't abide inaction in their energetic pursuit of results. Drivers aren't always the best collaborators but often are good at delegating details. They typically appear cool, independent and competitive and want to be recognized for accomplishments. You might notice a driver's tendency to engage in arguments and conflict.

Expressives

Like drivers, an expressive person often moves fast but will often be more responsive as they are oriented more toward people than tasks. Expressives tend to be persuasive as well as good storytellers who focus on the big picture and know how to motivate

a room. Enthusiastic and lively, the typical expressive likes change and dynamic environments, often presenting a big-picture vision for others to work out the details. They are excitable dreamers and spontaneous decision makers who value recognition. They think emotionally, yet dislike conflict and usually try to hold onto an optimistic view of the world.

Amiables

An amiable person probably makes the best counselor. They are great listeners, intuitive and oriented toward relationships and connecting with others. Less spontaneous than expressive people, they decide and move slowly, often contemplating risks, challenges and each step necessary for getting something done. Amiables simultaneously build trust and teams. They care about belonging in a group and want others to feel that same security. They want peace and try to avoid interpersonal conflict as much as they can.

Analyticals

"Just the facts" is what these people prefer. Less assertive and slower paced than many other types, an analytical person likes to take time, think logically and present well-organized details. They are precise and great organizers, always trying to nail down specific details. Accuracy is everything. Analyticals tend to be cautious decision makers but will likely provide accurate reports. They also have good problem-solving skills, even if they're not likely to rush into contentious conversations to sort out conflicts.

What is your style?

As you review the basic definitions of the four styles, you may immediately know which one is most like

you. Which style would you choose more often than the rest?

How can these categories make you a more effective leader?

Leading is never a one-size-fits-all job or process. Versatility is key. Here are some examples of how to adapt your social style based on specific situations:

If you are a driver, be cautious of your tendency to control other team members and conditions. Instead, demonstrate supportive skills and actions like listening, questioning and reinforcing the positive.

If you are an expressive, be cautious of your tendency to require approval from other team members. Demonstrate directive skills and actions such as assertiveness, focus and attention to detail.

If you are an amiable, be cautious of your tendency to resist new or different opportunities. Try demonstrating directive skills such as negotiation and divergent thinking and assertiveness and executing decisions quickly.

If you are an analytical, be cautious of your tendency to focus on perfection or weaknesses. Instead, demonstrate supportive skills and actions like listening empathetically, offering positive reinforcement of others and developing relationships.

How to motivate people

Who do you interact with? Who do you need to motivate? Think of a specific person. Which of the four styles sounds most like that individual? Consider the following when trying to motivate specific types.

When talking to drivers, get to the

(Continued on pg. 33: "Leadership.")

Devotions from International Lesson Series

LIVING THE WORD



The Rev. Lyndsie Blakely serves as the Minister of Discipleship at Farmville United Methodist Church in Farmville. She has an M.Div from Duke Divinity School and a B.A. in Religious Studies and Recreation and Leisure Studies from Virginia Wesleyan College. Blakely was ordained a Deacon in Full Connection in the Virginia Conference in 2015. Lyndsie and her husband, Josh, just welcomed their second son in February.

April 3, 2016

Using Our Faith for Others

Luke 7:1-10

My husband and I are teaching our three-year-old son how to pray. He has learned some of the classic mealtime blessings like “God is Great, God is Good” and “Johnny Appleseed,” but at night before bed we focus on praying for others. At first, Noah’s prayers often consisted of thanking God for his stuffed animals, the TV, his bed — whatever he could physically see around the house and his room. But slowly he came to realize the importance of praying for his family, friends and sometimes even people he has never met. He is beginning to understand more about this God who loves him, loves others and loves to hear even the voice of a small child who is giving thanks for his stuffed duck.

There is real power in intercessory prayer. The centurion in today’s lesson realized this. His slave, who was very important to him, is very ill and about to die. The centurion hears about Jesus and has faith not only in Jesus’ power to heal, but the authority that has been given to Jesus from God. He believes fully that Jesus can help and heal, and it’s that faith that we are called to imitate.

Do you feel your faith is strong enough in times of desperation to call on Jesus for help? Do you trust that God has given Jesus the authority and power to do God’s will? The centurion’s faith was used for the good of someone other than himself. We live in a broken world in need of God’s healing grace. May we each find ways to earnestly pray for the healing of our churches, our communities, our nation and our world, knowing that our Lord Jesus has the power to heal and reconcile all of creation.

April 10, 2016

The Joy in Forgiveness

Luke 7:36-50

In today’s lesson, Simon the Pharisee names a woman visitor a sinner, and Jesus does not refute this description. As this woman, an uninvited guest, lavishes extraordinary care on Jesus, Simon questions Jesus’ judgment for allowing the woman’s behavior. In response, Jesus tells Simon a parable reminding him of the importance and need for forgiveness no matter how seemingly significant or insignificant the sin.

I think it’s often easy to fall into this place of complacency like Simon the Pharisee in Luke 7. We find ourselves comparing our sins to others and internally declaring, “Well, I’m not so bad! He/she has done way worse things than I have!” We are able to see ourselves as generally good people, and that’s a good thing! The issue becomes when we decide to overlook our sinfulness and fail to see that what we might call our “smallest sins” still cause harm and separate us from God.

Through his parable, Jesus also helps Simon see the joy that comes with forgiveness. The woman knows how much grace has been extended to her in Jesus’ forgiveness and is so incredibly grateful that she seeks Jesus out and washes Jesus’ feet with her tears and hair and anoints them with costly oil.

When is the last time you responded with such joy to Jesus’ forgiveness? How do you show Jesus how grateful you are to him for lifting those burdens from you? And not just for forgiveness from what we might consider big or significant sins, but also for every time we turn our back on God and harm our relationship with God and neighbor.

There is joy in forgiveness, for that is the good news of Jesus Christ! We should celebrate that every day. And we are called to share that joy with others by offering our forgiveness as well. We all stand in need of God’s grace, and, when the sins of others cause us harm, God calls us to be a witness to God’s grace and love by forgiving those who have sinned against us. May we daily



live the words of the Lord's Prayer, "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

April 17, 2016

From Brokenness to Wholeness

Luke 8:26-39

In today's lesson, Jesus takes his first trip into Gentile territory and is immediately met by forces of evil. A man who is possessed by demons confronts Jesus. This man is alone, wandering the tombs and is a hazard not only to others but also to himself. It is a heartbreaking story that gives witness to the brokenness of humanity. When Jesus asks the man his name, he responds with "Legion, for we are many," because he is not just possessed by one demon, but by many. This man has no name, no identity left, except as a captive. He has become defined by his brokenness, by what hinders him and keeps him bound.

Unfortunately, I think we often find ourselves in the same situation. We might not call it demons, but don't we sometimes define ourselves by our deficiencies, faults and failures? Sometimes we allow these setbacks to possess us in ways that cause us to lose our identities as children of God. We get so focused on our brokenness, that it almost feels impossible to remember who we are and who God created us to be.

Isn't this the way of our culture — to point out every flaw and deficiency in our lives and tell us how to remedy it with this or that product? We are inundated with advertisements that can create in us a powerful sense of insecurity about our looks, status, possessions, for example, all with the goal of getting us to buy into some-

thing that promises to fix our brokenness.

Thankfully our lesson reminds us that Jesus is more powerful than any demon or demons that may hold a grip on our lives. Jesus reminds us of our true identity as beloved children of God, and that despite our brokenness and past failures, nothing can separate us from God's love. Jesus' healing power brings wholeness and salvation to the once possessed man, and his task now is to go and tell others of Jesus' love and power. We are called to do the same! Jesus is sending each of us out to share his healing love with those who find themselves held captive by their brokenness. Go, and share the good news that nothing can separate us from the love of God that seeks to make us whole again.

April 24, 2016


Seeking the Lost

Luke 15:11-24

The story of the Prodigal Son comes third in a series of parables about lost things — the first is the lost sheep, and the second is the lost coin. Each ends with rejoicing over the lost being found. We are reminded in each of God's love that seeks those who have turned away from God and of Jesus' mission to bring them back into relationship with God.

This year we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Order of the Deacon in The United Methodist Church. In many ways, this is the calling of a deacon — to seek out the lost and help bring them into relationship with God. Deacons are called to connect the church and the world through ministries of worship, service, compassion

and justice. They are invested in those who are already a part of the body of Christ — helping them to grow in their faithful discipleship and leading them into deeper relationships with Christ. Deacons are also invested in those who are currently disconnected with the body of Christ — those who have either turned away from the church and their faith, or who have never been a part of a community of faith. We as the deacon order also seek to equip the laity in this work of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Together, then, as clergy and laity we are commissioned to seek the lost and celebrate their return.

That means we each have a role. The parable of the Prodigal Son reminds us of the varied responses we could have. Who do you find you most relate to in this story? Do you find yourself connecting with the younger son — making impulsive decisions but then repenting and seeking to be reconciled to your family? Or are you more like the older son — faithfully doing what is asked of you, but getting upset when you don't receive the same celebration for your faithfulness that your younger brother receives after rebelling and returning home? Or do you connect with the father — ready with open heart and arms to welcome in and celebrate the lost as they return home? Know that wherever you find yourself in the story, God's love is unfailing and will continually seek you and all to be reconciled to the body of Christ. Will you join God and your brothers and sisters in Christ in this mission? 

CLERGY & DIACONAL



DEATHS



The Rev. William "Bill" Ray Withers, 85, of Winchester, died on Feb. 20, 2016. Bill was a veteran who served in the National Guard.

He received his Associate's degree from Potomac State College, his Bachelor's degree from Shepherd College, his Master's in Divinity from Eastern Mennonite Seminary and worked toward his Doctorate of Theology from Boston University. He retired from full-time ministry in June 1996 and continued to serve churches until June 2013. Bill ministered in both the West Virginia and Virginia Conferences. He was active in various civic, historic and religious organizations. In addition to his wife, Mary Marie Corathers, of 62 years, he is survived by his daughters, Susan Marie Fisher, Mary Elizabeth "Beth" Stone and Patricia Scott Withers Shiflett; his son, William Ray "Bill" Withers II; grandchildren, Tara Fisher, Kaitlin Fisher, Michelle Adkins, BM2 Jacob Bashioum, AE3 Travis Bashioum, Brittany Stone, PFC Joshua Stone, John Stone, Alexander Shiflett, Brandon Withers, Tyler Withers and Connor Withers; and one great-grandchild, Rahab Rosanna Adkins.

The Rev. Louis Wendell Hodges, 83, of Lexington, died Feb. 8, 2016. He is survived by his wife of 62 years, Helen Davis Hodges; sons, John Hodges and George Hodges; sister, Mary Aycock; one grandchild, Christine Hodges; two step-grandchildren, Shelly Farrington and Troy Baintor; nine step-great-grandchildren; and six step-great-great-grandchildren. Lou was a graduate of Millsaps College, Duke Divinity



School and Duke Graduate School with a PhD in Theology. He joined the religion department at Washington and Lee University (W&L) in 1960. In 1974, he created an ethics program entitled Society and the Professions, conducting seminars for undergraduates in Medicine, Law, Business and Journalism. In 1987, he was named a Fellow at the Hastings Center in New York and appointed the Fletcher Odie Thomas Professor of Religion at W&L. During the winter of 1995-1996, he was the Fulbright Scholar in Journalism Ethics appointed to Osmania University in Hyderabad, India, visiting in 17 different universities and meeting with the Press Council of India during his four-month stay. In 1997, he was appointed Knight Professor of Journalism Ethics at Washington and Lee, retiring from the university in that position in 2003. While at W&L, Lou gave numerous Baccalaureate addresses and was known as the unofficial chaplain to many students and personnel. After retiring, he returned for temporary appointments as a visiting professor. Louis was known throughout the area as guest minister in numerous churches.

Betty Woodruff Vess, mother of the **Rev. L. Michael Southall-Vess**, pastor at Arlington Forest UMC, Arlington District, died Feb. 29, 2016, at home in Lynchburg. She is survived by her husband, Lloyd; a sister, Nancy Dula; two daughters; one son; and three grandchildren.

School and Duke Graduate School with a PhD in Theology. He joined the religion department at Washington and Lee University

The Rev. Kathryn "Kathy" L. Pigg, retired since 2004, died Feb. 25, 2016. She began her ministerial career in the Northwest Texas Conference. She spent several years serving as a campus minister. The churches she served in the Virginia Conference include Broad Street and Wesley Chapel in the former Portsmouth District, and Mathews Chapel in the former Rappahannock District.

John "Johnny" Blanton Covington, 67, of Pamplin, died Feb. 19, 2016. He was a 1967 graduate of Appomattox High School and a graduate of Nashville Auto Diesel College. In 1968, he joined the National Guard and retired after 25 years of service. In 1994, he began a 16-year employment with Fuqua School retiring in 2010. He most recently worked for Napa in Farmville and Keysville and served as the pastor of Bethel United Methodist Church as well as St. John's United Methodist Church for the last 20 years. In addition to his wife of 44 years, Sallye Smith Covington, he is survived by his son, John Blanton Covington II (Becky) of Pamplin; his daughter, Emily Covington Coro (Keith) of Farmville; four grandchildren, John Douglas Hallik, Virginia Grace Covington, Alan Coro and Rachel Coro; his sister, Goldie Wilkerson (Johnny) of Prospect; and a special first cousin Wanda Vandegrift (Carroll) of Pamplin.

BIRTHS

The Rev. Kameron Wilds and his wife, Samantha Wilds, announce the birth of their daughter, **Ellinor Warren Wilds**, born Feb. 9 weighing 7 lbs., 3 oz. Ellinor has an older brother, Alexander. Kameron is the pastor at Smith Memorial UMC in Collinsville, Danville District.

("LEADERSHIP," continued from pg. 29.)


point sooner rather than later. Talk about results and the clear options needed to get them.

When talking to expressives, show how interested you are in their ideas. Embrace their enthusiasm and agree with them where you share common ground.

When talking to amiables, listen intently. Soften your language and assume they will take things personally. Influencing people can easily go awry if you're not careful.

When talking to analyticals, be thorough and well-prepared. Ask questions and be specific.

"Know thyself." The ancient Latin proverb is as true today as it ever has been. Learning about why we think and operate the way we do is enlightening and can even be enjoyable.

Of course, you might discover some work you'll need to do. Good leaders demonstrate flexibility and the humility to adapt. The reward will be better relationships and more productivity among your team. 

— Clay Morgan,
United Methodist Communications

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FROM THE BISHOP



Prayer will make differences

Friends, May the grace and peace from our risen Christ be with you.

Spring has come! We are in the Easter season! The temperature has been rising, and spring winds are softly touching our faces. We see the dogwoods blooming, and the leaves of the trees are getting greener and greener. In this Easter season it is our great joy to see God's continuing creation and the power of life. We cannot help but sing, "How great thou art, how great thou art."

On March 5, we had the fourth Bishop's Convocation on Prayer. The plenary speaker, Dr. Frederick Schmidt (Reuben Job Professor of Spiritual Formation, Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary), did a great job by challenging us with the message that the time has come to change the way we do church. He introduced prayer for discernment as the key for a renewal of our churches. Dr. Schmidt emphasized that prayer is the essence in

understanding the church as the body of Christ, and we need to have an assurance of God's answer to our prayers.

He also said that prayers for discernment begin with God-questions like where is God working in today's world and what does God want us to do for God's mission. Dr. Schmidt emphasized the importance of listening more to God than talking; participation of the congregation in prayers of discernment; and the importance of the fruits of prayer being tested by Scripture, tradition and our minds being transformed by the Spirit and experience. He also told us that prayers for discernment are to be followed by acts of obedience.

Listening to his presentation reaffirmed my discernment that I have been sharing with you: A renewal of our churches should be more than a reactive plan to save our institution. It should be a movement to restore a biblical and authentic church. What is an authentic church? What is the nature of a biblical church? It is the church led by the Holy Spirit. As the body of Christ it is the church where the head, our Lord, is fully honored and respected.

So, the important question we need to ask for the future of our churches is not an I-question, but a God-question: What is God's vision for us? What does God want us to do for our new future? Prayerfully discerning God's will is the key in planning our ministry. We need to move from Robert's Rules to prayerful discernment, although Robert's Rules have some merit in ordering our meetings. To me, our Convocation on Prayer provided me the opportunity, one more time, to think about how the church will be renewed and move toward a new future through prayer.

As I said in the March issue of the Advocate, April 10 will be a confer-

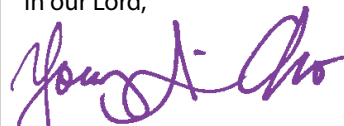
ence-wide day of prayer. This year we will use this day for a 24-hour Prayer Vigil for General Conference (GC). The upcoming GC is very important for the future of The United Methodist Church. Let us pray that only the Holy Spirit will lead the GC, and God's will will prevail in this gathering in May. If we do not honor the will of God, we will no longer be the church.

But the issue we have today is that we are too confident that only my conviction or my discernment is in accordance with God's will. I think we need more humility before God, humbly recognizing that I cannot own God's truth 100% and that I might be wrong. We also need openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit who is the owner and the leader of our churches. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit touch the hearts of all delegates to GC that they may wisely discern God's will and make decisions glorifying our Lord.

For our 24-hour Prayer Vigil, each district will develop its plans. I invite all of you to respond to this call and to join in this prayer movement. Prayer will change not only ourselves but also the church. Prayer will make differences in the world. We need to believe in God who listens to and answers our prayers. We need to believe in the power of prayer. As Dr. Schmidt says, if we pray, God will show up! Not always in miraculous ways. Sometimes in our routine daily lives God speaks to us and helps us to discern God's way.

So, let us keep on praying for our upcoming GC: Thy will be done in us and in our General Conference as it is in heaven! Lord, have mercy on us. 🌹

In our Lord,


Young Jin Cho

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