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Virginia United Methodist

# Advocate

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December 2011



*Gifts of the Spirit*

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

— Virginia Conference Vision Statement

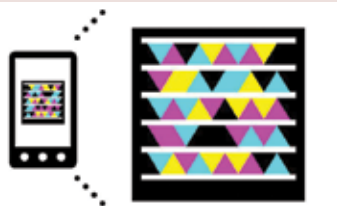
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**Put your gifts to use in service for God**



**Neill Caldwell**  
Editor

All of us can remember at least one very special Christmas gift. For me there was a very particular football jersey that became difficult for my mother to find. She finally enlisted the aid of her twin brother in California. I still remember the feeling of excitement in seeing that beautiful jersey spread out atop my other gifts on Christmas morning. It was just a bit of fabric that was soon worn and dirty from football games in the backyard, but it was special to me. And as I remember it now, the effort to secure it was even more special.

Our topic this month is about gifts, a fitting thing to consider as we enter the Christmas season. But these gifts are not the kind that you receive from a friend or family member, not the kind that we make at the time for the offering in worship, but the gifts that God bestows on us. In the New Testament Greek it’s *charismata*, which is the plural of *charisma*, which is the Greek word for grace. So these gifts, part of God’s grace, are given freely to us.

I asked a few pastors and laypersons to write a personal essay this month on one of the gifts of the Spirit. Our commentary section includes an essay by Dr. Jennifer Braatan, president of Ferrum College, on the Gift of Love. Bishop Kammerer also writes in her monthly column on the special Gifts of the Spirit required for bishops and district superintendents.

God empowers each of us with different abilities, gifts and graces. It’s up to us to make use of them in ways that uplift God and the church.

Four times in the New Testament Paul writes about the gifts that the Holy Spirit empowers us with: in the 12th chapter of the letter to the Romans, twice in the 28th chapter of the first letter to the church in Corinth, and also in the letter to the Ephesians, in Chapter 4. The “gift list” includes things like Prophecy, Serving, Teaching, Exhortation, Giving, Leadership, Mercy, Wisdom, Knowledge, Faith, Healings, Miracles, Distinguishing between Spirits, Speaking in Tongues, Interpretation of Tongues, and finally the types of church servants (Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist and Pastor/Teacher).

Peter also mentions gifts of the Spirit, the fairly wide-reaching “Whoever speaks” and “Whoever renders service.”

I often joke that my gift is distinguishing other people’s gifts. But that gift is actually on Paul’s list!

None of us have all of these gifts, of course, and some of us only may have one. But all of us are given these gifts in some portion by our Creator.

God gave these gifts so that we could support the ministry and church created by God’s greatest Gift, God’s son, Jesus Christ. Through that supreme gift, God makes all of us God’s children and rewards us with gifts we do not deserve: the special talents and power that we are to use in God’s service. The Gifts of the Spirit lead us to serve in ways that offer our greatest joy.

What’s your gift? How will you put it to use in service to the Kingdom of God?

*Neill Caldwell*

**More info on the Web...** The United Methodist Church’s Web site offers an excellent section on Gifts of the Spirit, including an online spiritual assessment tool. To learn more, go to this Web link:  
[www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1Lh/b.1355371/k.9501/Spiritual\\_Gifts.htm](http://www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1Lh/b.1355371/k.9501/Spiritual_Gifts.htm)

# Experiencing gifts of the Spirit as fruits

by Flor Norris

Much has been written about the gifts of the Spirit, but I chose to go back to the Bible and read again about the promises that God is offering us in Galatians 5:22 (NLT):

***But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.***

***There is no law against these things!***

God's presence is what we search for every day of our lives. To live an everyday life with God is what we all long for. I truly believe that we all have been blessed with these wonderful gifts and promises we also call "fruits."

If we use our imagination and think of these gifts that way, we can describe them as delicious fruits, rare and extravagant fruits that we can grow in our own garden, in our lives, and maybe then we will be able to embrace and nurture them, allowing them to grow so we can share them with others. We keep waiting for all these promises to be fulfilled in our lives, wondering if we are ever going to be blessed by having a full basket of blessings, when we already do.

This morning I stopped by the grocery store to purchase some items I needed for our Saturday night worship gathering. As I was pulling out of the store's parking lot in my car, there was a man in the corner waiting to cross the street in a motorized wheelchair. It had to be about 40 degrees outside. This man was waiting patiently

for me to go ahead and make a right turn. I stopped, smiled at him, waved at him, letting him know that he could go ahead and cross the street. With a gentle voice he said "thank you."

I experienced God and many of these blessings we call "fruits of the Spirit" through this man this morning. He had a smile on his face (joy), he waited for me to allow him to cross the street (patience), and there was gentleness in his voice, peace and kindness in his demeanor. God's love was present. God shared fruits with me this morning.

We all have fruits to share. Awareness is what we need in our lives to fully live into these gifts, to know they are there for us, to develop them, and to give to the ones we encounter in our lives.

Living an everyday life with God is what we all want and need.

Receiving God's blessings every second of our lives is what God wants for us. Let us be reminded that God's gifts of love and grace are with us, always. □

— The Rev. Flor Norris is an associate pastor at Crossroads UMC in the Arlington District.



***We keep waiting for all these promises to be fulfilled in our lives, wondering if we are ever going to be blessed by having a full basket of blessings, when we already do.***

# The Gift of *Giving*

by Tom Berlin

## Generous giving is the gift that truly changes us

Pastors and laypersons alike are comfortable asking for the spiritual gifts listed in Paul's writings to be put to use in the church. There is one gift that makes us less comfortable: the gift of giving. And by giving, I am speaking of giving money. We should be comfortable asking people to exercise their gift of giving. We should be downright enthusiastic about it. Be assured, some have more of this gift than others. Not money, but the gift of giving.

My wife, Karen, is one of these people. Give her a credit card, send her into the mall and not one dollar will be spent. The merchandise holds no appeal. But tell her about someone's need, or a cause that is worthy of support, and she will come alive with a desire to contribute.

Giving changes us. When we got married, I did not have the gift. But Karen did, and she made sure we tithed and gave other offerings. At first I was hoping that she was using the word "tithe" to say "give a bit to the offering." But she meant it in the biblical sense. Ten percent. And don't argue with her about gross or net income. I think her logic is that we have been grossly blessed and need to grossly give. No matter what our income level, this has been the spiritual discipline she led us to embrace.

As a result, I have learned to trust God. I have experienced the grace of God showing up at just the right time in every

aspect of our life, including our bank balance. Because I could not change the tithe, the tithe changed me. It taught me the difference between needs and wants. It made me embrace a simpler lifestyle. It whispered to me when I started to purchase things that were really optional that "enough is really enough." And it made me happy to be more generous and give with a cheerful heart. Over the years, Karen's gift has become my gift as well, and I like me more because of it.

Giving enables us to change the world. One of the most enjoyable offerings we take at Floris UMC every year happens on Christmas Eve. We use the theme Michael Slaughter (Ginghamburg [Ohio] UMC pastor and nationally known author) shared: "Christmas is not *your* birthday." That phrase has changed our Christmas. Over the years we have supported the Child Rescue Center and Mercy Hospital where our members go and serve in Sierra Leone. We started Connections for Hope, a nonprofit center down

the street, which dramatically improved the services of our local Free Medical Clinic and five other organizations. We supported "Camp Hutchinson," a month-long summer camp at our partner elementary school, to make sure kids are properly fed during the summer months and accelerate their learning in math and reading. We have touched thousands of lives and relieved suffering. Our members joyfully use their other gifts to serve in these and other ministries, but they could not do so without the gift of giving. These good things all cost good money.

Our members tell me that they are excited to go to our church Web site on Christmas morning and see the total of the offering. Some do this before they open any gifts for themselves. They know that as a church, they have both the calling and the ability to change the world. This year we really can't afford to give away all of the Christmas Eve offering. It has been a hard year economically and we have a lot of financial anxiety as a church. But we will give it all away anyway, because the poor have not become richer, and we can't imagine welcoming the Messiah any other way.

Today a friend shared with me a family Christmas tradition. Instead of exchanging Christmas gifts among the adults, each family shares ways they spent their time, money or talents during the year to make the world a better place. They gather around the tree and hear what each family has been up to during the past year. Everyone participates. They talk about mission trips, events to raise funds, why they made certain donations, the people they met and the experiences they shared. As a result, every member understands that the value of their family is giving, and that giving is a true gift and great blessing.

This family exhibits an understanding of God's Reign. They are content with their possessions, but discontent with the state of a fallen world. They are servants and stewards of God. We must never hesitate to call out such qualities in the life of the church. It is too great a gift to ignore. □

— The Rev. Tom Berlin is senior pastor at Floris UMC in Herndon.

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# The Gift of Mercy/Healing

## The gift of healing comes through relationships

by Nancy Forrest

I am a wife, mother, grandmother, obstetric nurse and lactation consultant. I am not a theologian, so I prefer to keep theological concepts simple. For me, being a Christian is all about relationships. First and foremost, my faith is grounded in my relationship with the God who created me and loves me beyond measure, a relationship only possible because of Jesus Christ's redemptive act of death and resurrection. Then, this relationship with God through Christ guides and influences all other relationships in my life, and the heart-to-heart question that I try to ask myself is "Did they see Jesus in me today?"

The apostle Paul talks about the importance of these relationships in faith development when he describes the purpose for receiving and using spiritual gifts. Paul writes "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." (Romans 12: 4-5) "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good... If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." (1 Corinthians 12:7, 26)

Whether small or large, rural or urban, we church folks are always in need of some sort of healing – physical, emotional and spiritual. One of the greatest blessings I have received in my life is being able to experience moments when the Holy Spirit administered mercy and healing to someone through use of my nursing skills.

As is often the case with memories, the first time that I experienced being used this way within our church family seems most vivid. I was a young pastor's wife with two young sons. My husband David's congregation was small in size and a fairly close-knit community consisting, in part, of several "extended family" groups. One of these "founding family" members was a middle-aged woman whose husband, to my knowledge, never darkened the door of the church. While she was a very caring, faithful congregant, her husband was a rough, demanding curmudgeon. A few years into Dave's appointment there, we learned that the husband had been diagnosed with advanced colon cancer. Invasive surgeries and chemotherapy did little to slow down the tumor's progress, and the man was all-too-soon "home to die" with a colostomy to manage. Although she faithfully cared for his other physical needs, the wife just couldn't face the prospect of learning to care for that colostomy. So I volunteered to go over and perform the necessary ostomy care every two or three days. I can see those days in my memory as if they had happened yesterday – the man's initial resistance to receiving my care; cursing his wife when he didn't realize that I was already there, standing outside the door; his ultimate resignation to my administrations and how at first he wouldn't look at me at all. I understood a little about how he must be feeling – embarrassed about the culturally offensive odors, ashamed that a young woman would see him this way – so weak and helpless, so emasculated. The care I gave him wasn't much and was really more or less routine for a nurse like me. I didn't have to continue the care for more than a few weeks

as he died rather quickly. But over those brief weeks of care we became friends. As I cared for his body, I filled in the awkward moments by talking to him about my young children's antics, about day-to-day problems in the community, about life. Sometimes he would hold my hand for awhile after I had finished my tasks, gradually drifting off to sleep aided by his morphine pain medication.

Several months following his death, his widow honored my husband by professionally typing his entire thesis for his Doctor of Ministry degree. When we tried to pay her for her typing services, she said "I'll never be able to thank you enough for what you did for my husband when you came and cared for him. You made him feel somewhat less deformed, somehow more human. It gave him some peace."

Yes, I've witnessed the Holy Spirit's gift of healing happening through the miraculous skills of a surgeon and the diagnostic wisdom of a specialist. But I'm a simple nurse who has found that Christ's healing also occurs through small things like a gentle touch and a kind word of concern. And always, I believe, the gift of healing comes through relationships. □

– Nancy Forrest is an obstetric nurse who has been actively involved in medical mission work for more than 25 years. She and her husband of 34 years, the Rev. David Forrest, live in Manassas, where he is senior pastor of Manassas St. Thomas UMC.

# The Gift of Preaching

**Preaching is a gift to be nurtured, fed, grown and practiced**

by Clarence Brown

Preaching. That, for most people, if not all, is a fearsome word. Of all the things those who respond to God's call to ministry consider and discern, to reflect on the fact that week in and week out one is assumed to stand in, as it were, for God is daunting.

Preaching. It is variously defined. My homiletics professor, the sainted Dr. Isaac R. Clark, termed it "the proclaiming of the Word of God upon the contemporary situation." I also recall it being characterized as the "Word of God filtered through personality." However you frame it, we can certainly point to it as a significant item among the charismata lifted to us by the Apostle Paul.

To me and to many, a reclaiming of these Spirit-given gifts is crucial as we seek to become the vital congregations so badly needed in our communities. Their primary purpose is to build the church and bless the world. As we dig beneath the Pauline admonitions, scholars note that word group is prominent in Paul's lexicon. As opposed to the Old Testament sense of glimpsing the future, the emphasis is on the revelation and testimony of Jesus Christ. The various functions of preaching and the preacher connect with those purposes in very important ways.

Preaching functions as pastoral care. The pastor's intimate relationship with the congregation's members allows preaching to be an entrée into the transformational needs for healing and wholeness provided in the renewed and renewing relationship with Christ. Preaching as Christian education allows those who need to grow in their knowledge and counsel of Scripture to reflect on what the relationship to God in Christ calls them to, individually and collectively. Preaching can be a prophetic call to envision and work for the Kingdom of God within the context of the communities we serve and also can speak gospel truth to the structures that preclude that realization.

All of these functions are dependent on a singular understanding inherent in the texts: that this is a gift. We must constantly seek, discern, identify and confirm them. Once identified, they must be nurtured, fed, grown and practiced. One must make full use of the tools available for their growth. The use of critical biblical studies, the theology and history of the church, the resources of the craft of effective preaching must all interrelate and make use of. As one preacher has noted, the people may not be able to spell *exegesis*, but they know a lie when they hear one.

Last, and to me most important, is something I have shared with many who have shared the responsibility of what our friend [Virginia Conference retired] Bishop Joe Pennel termed the "relentless return of the Sabbath:" our proclamation should reflect our personal joy of what God has done for us. People come hungry, seeking a hint of a possibility that their current broken state of restlessness and dissatisfaction might be transformed. Let us show them Jesus. □

— The Rev. Clarence Brown is senior pastor at Annandale UMC, Alexandria District.

# The Gift of Teaching

**Using the natural gift of teaching to strengthen the church**

by Jim Noland

As United Methodists seek to recover the power of our Wesleyan heritage, we have placed renewed emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit. We have come to a deeper appreciation of the relationship between our baptism and the power of the Spirit to remake us into the likeness of Christ. We also know that we are formed as Christians in community and that a faithful community must rely upon the gifts of the Spirit to give it shape and direction.

Before I entered the ordained ministry, I was a teacher. Teaching seemed to come naturally to me. I enjoyed helping others come to new and deeper understandings. When I answered the call to preach, one of my first challenges was to learn the difference between a lecture and a sermon. In my case, lectures were relatively easy, but lectures are not sermons. Lectures, in the good sense, convey new and important information; in the negative, they nag and harangue. Sermons may contain information, but they are about much more; they are about the transformation of hearts as well as minds. Sermons should inspire and offer a grace-filled vision of life lived in response to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

My challenge has been to integrate my inclination to teach with my call to preach. As I have learned to rely more on God's Spirit, I have found my natural love of teaching transformed into a spiritual gift by virtue of the fact that it is now employed to equip disciples and to strengthen the church.

I have discovered that spiritual gifts are the ways in which God's power is incarnated in the lives of willing disciples. □

— The Rev. Jim Noland is senior pastor at Reveille UMC, Richmond District.

# The Gift of Leadership

## Diligence, patience are marks of true leaders

by Alan Combs

For me to be writing an article about leadership as a spiritual gift is ironic because I often don't trust the word "leadership" in the context of the life of the church. Sometimes I get the feeling that "leadership" is often our new catchphrase for the idol that will save us and our denomination in place of Jesus Christ.

While we have a strong polity as United Methodists, we often have a weakened sense of our ecclesiology as the Body of Christ formed and shaped by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Instead of Christ being the church's one foundation, our actions and conversations imply that if we can just rearrange *The Book of Discipline*, our church structures, and our leadership, we may be able to save ourselves from the sure doom that is regularly being pronounced by so many voices throughout the connection.

My suspicion of leadership language does not arise out of a conviction that the church doesn't need good leaders. Rather, what often makes leadership language problematic are the ways such language is carried over uncritically from the business world, or worse, we find it as coded language that emerges from anxiety about the loss of male hegemony in the lay and clergy leadership in our church. We get the sense that if we can just get the right person (often a man) in the right position to take control of a situation or a church, then there may be hope of turning the ship to prevent it from running aground. As Amy Laura Hall points out in her article "Post-Heroic Ministry," "leadership connotes a kind of heroism."<sup>1</sup> Rather than the kind of long work of collaboration, conversation, and "being with" that is often required of a church leader, we get a vision of the clergy or lay leader who will "save" the languishing church.

On the other hand, Paul explicitly

lifts up leadership as a spiritual gift in Romans 12:8. Further, the Scriptures tell us of a God who raises up men and women to provide leadership for God's people.

How then, do we hold on to leadership as a spiritual gift without allowing it to be corrupted and co-opted by the various voices of anxiety in the life of the church? I think the key is the word that Paul uses in conjunction with leadership: diligence. Diligence is not the attribute of heroic ministry. It is the work of ministry that understands, as Dr. Hall suggests:

*The most salient virtue required for church ministry is the uncelebrated yet uncommon virtue called patience. Many pastors 10 years out will tell you that the blessed, holy, work of ministry is repetitive and slow, and not even remotely like the big-screen adventures mass-marketed to this generation.*<sup>2</sup>

Patience is often the last thing we want for our leaders. If we ask what we want out of our leaders, we may say "dynamic!" "excellent!" or "effective!" "Patient" is rarely mentioned.

Often we feel that our leaders should be moving and operating with a grave sense of urgency to "fix" all those things that are ailing in the life of a church. Indeed, the good clergy and lay leader will attend to the places in the community that need remedy, but I believe Paul is saying that the symptom of those who possess the spiritual gift of leadership is



diligence. This is the diligence of ones who are willing to sit with others and listen to who a church is, who they have been, and who they believe God is calling them to be. This is the diligence of ones who continue to speak prophetically about the church as bearer and proclaimer of good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom for the oppressed. This is the diligence of ones who continue to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor in a world that seems to be full of bad news. The diligence we find in this kind of leadership comes through ones who provide leadership in a liturgy of word and table as clergy and laypersons week in and week out who may feel, at times, very unproductive. Yet, this liturgy is also the place where the Spirit shapes and forms us, where Jesus Christ is present in the Word proclaimed and consumed, so that our worship spills out into the world as the Spirit leads us into places we never could have otherwise or previously considered. □

—The Rev. Alan Combs is pastor of Lane Memorial UMC, Lynchburg District.

### FOOTNOTES:

1. Amy Laura Hall, "Post-Heroic Ministry," *PRISM magazine*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2011), pg. 22.
2. *Ibid.*

# The Gift of *Faith*

## The three most faithful words ...

by Amanda Garber

Sometimes I like the sound of my own voice. Okay, I'll be completely honest. I almost *always* like the sound of my own voice. I like to have "the answer" and I enjoy sharing that answer with others. I like to be right, because throughout my journey, I repeatedly have received messages that to be "faithful" is to be "right." Imagine my surprise when I slowly started to realize that the three most faithful words in our shared human experience could be, "I don't know."

*I don't know.* I've spoken those three words repeatedly throughout my journey of church planting with young adults. I've consumed countless cups of coffee while listening to questions from 20-somethings. Many of the young adults who connect with RISE are disconnected from God and church, and following Jesus in the midst of community is new for them. They haven't yet learned that there are some things that "you just don't talk about in church or mention to your pastor." Consequently, I hear a lot of honesty and pain. I hear a lot of struggle. I hear a lot of confusion. I hear a lot of resilience and hope. And, I am regularly asked to explain *why*. I am faced with questions that are raw and gut-wrenching. Despite my very best efforts to defend God and the church, and present a well-defined and reasonable argument, I consistently find myself looking into their eyes and saying, "I don't know...but I know that I am here. And I know that God is here." And, oddly enough, that answer often seems to be more than enough. Oddly enough, they find that answer "faithful."

I could share story after story about young adults who have fundamentally changed my core with their authenticity and holy wrestling. Time and time again, they embody God's grace and are mirrors for me. They have transformed my understanding of "faith" and "faithfulness." One of these young adults is a 23-year-old woman named Kate. Kate is brilliant and asks questions that would baffle even the Board of Ordained Ministry. She regularly dances and wrestles with God and has a vibrant, spunky and complex faith. She is a gift from God, and her faith has stretched me in unimaginable ways. She shared the blog post at right titled "The Path is Narrow" on RISE's Facebook page last week, and it is a powerful statement of faith. May we all have the courage to speak with Kate's honesty. May we all have the courage to wrestle like Kate. May we all be faithful enough to whisper, "I don't know." □

— The Rev. Amanda Garber is pastor at RISE, a new United Methodist faith community in Harrisonburg.

## The Path is Narrow

(by Kate)

**I'm uncomfortable with the label, "Christian."** I hate saying that I'm a Christian, because I know exactly what that means to people who have been burned by the church. It means that I'm judgmental, hypocritical, pompous, selfish, condemning and isolated from the real world. Maybe that's part of the reason why I've always had such difficulty accepting Jesus; I didn't want the label, and I didn't want to become one of those people.

But then, I found out that my best friend has cancer.

The thing you need to know about Joe is that he and I have had a rocky relationship. We've been friends since first grade, but there were several times in high school when we refused to speak to each other, times that would last for months before one of us caved. He's broken my heart time and time again, but one of my weaknesses (or strengths, depending on how you look at it) is that I'm forgiving of others to the point of being a doormat. So we kept mending our relationship as best we could, ignoring what we couldn't fix, and continued being friends. Few people have made me as furious as he has, or as depressed, but few people have made me laugh so much in my life.

Since we've gone to college, I only see him once or twice a year, and I talk to him maybe a half dozen times beyond that on the phone. I'm just not a phone person. It was unusual when I got back from a run one day about a month ago, sweaty and hungry and in a hurry to get to a volunteer gig, and noticed that he was calling me.

"Hey Joe, what's up?"

"Are you busy right now?"

"Well, I just got back from a run, and I'm gonna have to head out soon to go volunteering, but I have a few minutes. What's up?"

"Kate... I have cancer."

After the shock passed and he gave me some more details about what was happening medically, I found out that he would be leaving his college the next afternoon to get treatment from home. I asked if it would be an inconvenience if I were to come visit him that night — his school is about three hours from mine. After he thanked me profusely, I got his address and looked up some directions.

Within four hours I was at his school, surrounded by his friends and their gratitude that I had come all the way up to see him. I was so confused by this — who wouldn't do this for their friend? I've known him for about 15 years, so why wouldn't I come to see him?

A huge group of us walked about two miles to go to Joe's favorite frozen yogurt place. By the time we got



# The Gift of Prophecy

by Jeff Harlow

***Am I a prophet? Dear God, I hope not. I don't have many friends as it is.***

back, my leg was cramping horribly from my earlier three-mile run and three-hour car ride, and I was limping for the rest of the night. We all played Wii games.

Then, I was left alone with Joe for the first time since I had gotten there. We talked about old times, strange stories that his college friends wouldn't really know or understand, and sometimes we talked about what would happen to him now that he was going home, and sometimes we were just silent.

It was during this time that I felt this huge wave of love for Joe. I drove all this way, even though I can't afford the gas, because I love him. Even though he had hurt me in the worst ways at times, I still loved him with everything I had.

Is this how God loves us? No matter how much we hurt God, or how much we hurt each other in God's name, or how many times we look at everything God offers and turn away from it in favor of embracing hell on earth, does God still love us?

Holding Joe and being held by him, in the most innocent way, just offering comfort in the only way I could, once all my words had failed me... that was the first time that I truly felt that I could call myself a Christian. Following Jesus means loving those who've hurt us. Following Jesus means holding those whom I've never met. Following Jesus means dropping everything and driving through the night just so I can see Joe.

Following Jesus means holding someone who has cancer at four in the morning, and telling them that you'll be there for them, no matter what.

Following Jesus means love. □

In the Romans version, Paul introduces his list of spiritual gifts with a humbling reminder "not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." (12:3, NRSV) Then Paul presents the list. Which is fine until I bump into "prophecy." I realize that Paul's purpose in this passage is to provide examples for the many and varied ways the church expresses God's grace in our lives. But let's be realistic. Being prophetic and having sober self-judgment do not blend well.

For good reason. Prophets often sound arrogant and pushy. Few of us *want* to claim this gift. Who *wants* to be a prophet? An effective prophet – by design – makes others uncomfortable, unless I am talking about telling the future, which I am not. A *foretelling* prophet is the fun kind of prophet. It's the call to *forth* telling that sends a chill up my spine.

But I can't stop myself. Although my mother would tell you I never had much control over my mouth, I am talking about something different. I respond to the prophetic urge because I cannot *not* say what I say.

I wasn't always this way. Here's a confession. I think I was too quiet for years, decades even. Perhaps I was weak, cowardly, even disobedient. Or, perhaps God was preparing me for the right time, for the right context. Or, could it be that I needed to simmer longer, like a good stew, to mature? I am hardly claiming to be mature now, far from it, so I wonder if the time is right now if only because I am bold (stupid?) enough now. Regardless of the risks, regardless of the vocational or professional consequences, I can no longer ignore the smoldering message within me.

And so, I make people uncomfortable. It's my gift. To be honest, I wonder why more of us do not pursue this ministry of discomfort. After all, the message I hear from the Gospels is about a Christ who made many people uncomfortable, especially when he confronted the established religious leaders of the day. It seems to me, as Jesus drew closer to Jerusalem at the end of his ministry, the crowds became smaller and the religious leaders more self-protected. I wonder then if our zealous pursuit of numeric growth is the exact opposite of what Jesus had in mind. Maybe, if we tell the truth about the Gospel, our congregations will become smaller. I won't comment about our religious leaders, except to ask: How might a bunch of self-protected white guys behave with such a challenge?

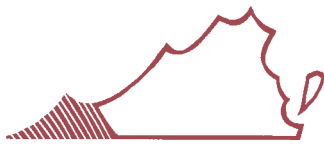
Or for me, this could all be a charade to provide a legitimate cover for avoiding people. If I make you uncomfortable by talking about the radical Gospel message, you might go away. Good. My wife will tell you I am most content when I am alone with a book or a keyboard.

I wish it was that simple. Unfortunately for me, I happen to really believe this stuff. I happen to really believe that the radical demands of the Gospel message are extraordinarily clear and overwhelmingly simple. If we claim to follow Jesus, if we claim to be the living presence of Christ in today's world, then we must clearly and simply love as Jesus loved, live as Jesus lived, and sacrifice as Jesus sacrificed. If we claim to follow Jesus, then we will make the kinds of choices Jesus would make – about how we spend our money and time and, yes, about how we vote. We will make the kinds of choices Jesus would make – about how we welcome strangers to our land, and how we protect our vulnerable children, and how we respond to our enemies.

I suppose I should feel sorry if I make you uncomfortable ... Actually, I'm not sorry, because I must say what I cannot *not* say. And if it does make you uncomfortable, just remember, it's my gift. Get over it. I have. □

– The Rev. Jeff Harlow is pastor at Enon UMC, Richmond District.





# Virginia

## Virginia Conference delegation chooses Rev. Young Jin Cho as episcopal nominee

**T**he Rev. Dr. Young Jin Cho, superintendent of the Arlington District, has been selected as the 2012 episcopal nominee from the Virginia Conference.

Members of the conference delegation to the 2012 General and Jurisdictional conferences made the selection during their meeting Oct. 22 at Trinity UMC in Richmond.

Cho will join nominees from other conferences under consideration for the episcopacy at next summer's Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference at Lake Junaluska, N.C. At least five new bishops will be elected.

Young Jin Cho was born in South Korea in 1946 and graduated from the Methodist Theological Seminary in Seoul. He came to the United States in 1979 and continued his studies at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., earning both a master's and doctorate in ministry. He was ordained in the East Annual Conference of the Korean Methodist Church in 1977 and transferred to the Virginia Conference in 1983. He served as the senior pastor of the Korean United Methodist Church of Greater Washington in McLean for 22 years before being appointed to the Cabinet in 2005 by Bishop Charlene Kammerer. During his tenure at Korean United Methodist Church of Greater Washington, the church went through three building projects, and has grown to be one of the largest and most vital congregations in the conference.

He has served the church and the community in various capacities: as president of the Korean Wesley Foundation, president of Partner's Church Association for the renewal of the Korean United Methodist Church,



Young Jin Cho

Board of Ordained Ministry, Board of Discipleship and the Commission on Ethnic Minority Local Church Concerns. He was elected a delegate to the 2008 and 2012 General Conferences. Cho received the Denman Evangelism Award in 1991. He is also the U.S. chair of an organization that assists refugees from North Korea.

Cho and his wife, Kiok, a deacon in full connection, have two daughters, Grace and Sophia, and one son, Chris.

The Oct. 22 delegation meeting, in the words of the Rev. Tom Berlin, focused on the "as is" story of the church. Dr. Lovett Weems, of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership at Wesley Seminary, joined the delegation to speak about the challenges and opportunities facing The United Methodist Church. Weems noted that while financial assets have increased since 1968, the number of church members and churches have declined. This contrasting data is possible

because our economic model has been that each year fewer people have given more money. He said that this is not a sustainable pattern for the next 40 years, and indeed has hit some major roadblocks in the last several years, due to what he calls the coming "death tsunami."

Weems suggested that appropriate responses are to: (1) reset our financial baseline (the gap between declining membership and raising budget); and, (2) refocus on reaching more people. We will not have the energy and focus to reach more people until we reset our financial baseline, Weems said, because all our energy will be attuned to surviving that financial gap.

Weems encouraged delegates to ask the hard questions; think about the direction from which the information is coming; don't get caught up in the emotion of something that has big dollars to which it is attached, because we have not been effective at large national programs in the past.

He highlighted pivotal issues facing the General Conference as: (1) guaranteed appointment and minimum salary; (2) pension and health benefits; (3) tipping point moments in terms of reaching new people, younger people and more diverse people.

His advice for jurisdictional delegates was to try and break through the "practiced questions" as they think about episcopal candidates. Weems suggested that one of the most reliable indicators of episcopal leadership will be the candidate's past behavior and track record.

Berlin reviewed the episcopal nomination process begun at the

*(Continued on next page, Episcopal)*

## Episcopal

(Continued from previous page)

July delegation meeting. There were 14 elders in the Virginia Conference who received cards inviting them to consider a call to the episcopal office. Those individuals were invited to create a circle of trust to explore this call. If led in this direction, persons were invited to attend a day of discernment together at Shenandoah University on Sept. 29. Six persons attended that meeting, and out of that group, two discerned that God may be leading them in this direction.

Several who were in the process described it as affirming and grace-filled, challenging them to think about their vocation and their lives, and a process filled with integrity and the Holy Spirit. They noted that the process removed a sense of competition from the episcopal nomination.

The delegation heard from Cho and the Rev. Clarence Brown, pastor of Annandale UMC. Lay Leader Shirley Cauffman asked the two candidates five questions which had been chosen in advance by delegates. Cho responded via video, since he was helping to lead a trip of pastors to Korea.

Berlin went over the Jurisdictional Covenant regarding elections, and it was signed by the delegation.

David Domnisse, conference Treasurer, made a presentation about the finances of the conference, noting that over the last 16 years, conference expenses have grown 80 percent mainly due to clergy benefit increases. At the same time, the paid apportionment from local churches has dropped to a low of 84 percent in 2010. Expenses by local churches also have increased, particularly in areas of clergy, staff, capital expenses and debt retirement. □

— The Rev. Beth Givens, pastor of Kenwood UMC in Ashland, and Neill Caldwell

NOTE: Weems' presentation is summarized here: <<http://vimeo.com/22392014>>. A link to his presentation to the Virginia Delegation is available on the conference Web site <[www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org)>.

## Assembly center at Blackstone changes name to increase market

After 56 years as the Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center (VUMAC), the assembly center in Blackstone will now do business as Blackstone Conference and Retreat Center.

"There are times when the assembly center is not used for any United Methodist function, which creates a severe budget shortfall," said Executive Director Sam McCracken in a statement. "If we cast out our net further, seeking participation from other Christ-centered organizations, we believe that we have a broader opportunity to fill this facility." The legal name of the institution will not change, and the facility's Web address will remain [www.vumac.org](http://www.vumac.org) for now.

"Since other Christian conference and retreat centers seldom brand themselves with a denomination (for example: Westview on the James, Eagle Eyrie, Shrine Mont, etc.), other churches (Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Baptist, etc.) feel that our focus of use is solely for United Methodists, therefore limiting utilization of our facility," McCracken said.

"While we are not funded by the Virginia United Methodist Conference, it is the financial support from individuals, churches and groups, such as United Methodist Women and

United Methodist Men, which continue to sustain this facility, for which we are truly thankful. It is our hope and prayer that our United Methodist family will continue its support. The organization and individual needs of United Methodist groups will continue to have first choice of available dates for events, as well as any United Methodist Church entity."

The Farmville District established the Blackstone Female Institute in 1892, and the conference opened the Assembly Center in 1956. Last year the conference Trustees transferred the deed to the Blackstone board.

"Blackstone is grateful and committed to its roots in the Virginia United Methodist Conference," McCracken said. "These roots have provided a strong foundation of support and strength for over 115 years and it is our sincere hope that this foundation will only strengthen in years ahead.

"Thanks to your generous support we survived last year's financial distress, but in order not to return there it is essential that we become more widely used. We trust that you will continue to support this great institution," he said, "as we are committed to you in service as a place to retreat, renew and know Christ's peace." □



# Virginia Conference pastor Jim Athearn retires as head of denomination's Russia Initiative

**R**ussia Initiative advocates celebrated the leadership of the Rev. Dr. Jim Athearn of Virginia as he steps down from coordinating the initiative.

Appointed to the initiative seven years ago by the Rev. Sam Dixon, Athearn announced his retirement via e-mail to thousands of supporters across The United Methodist Church in Eurasia and the United States.

His retirement is effective Dec. 31. Athearn is a retired elder who lives in Clear Brook near Winchester. He started his Virginia Conference ministry in 1957 as a student pastor.

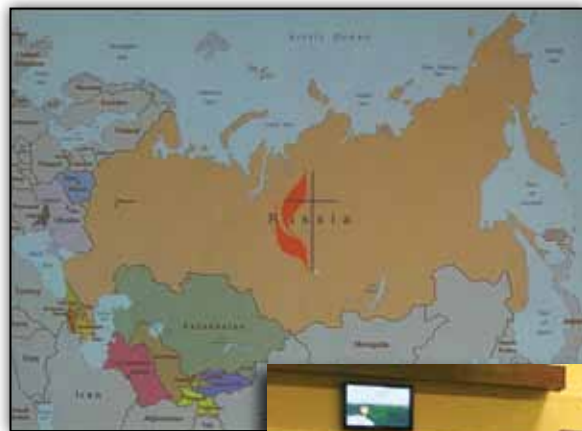
In a letter thanking the Russia and Eurasia advocates around the world, Athearn wrote: "It has been a joy and an honor to serve the church in this role over the last seven years. I am so grateful for the many U.S. churches that have participated in partnership with the United Methodist churches in Eurasia. Some of you have maintained these partnerships since the early 1990s and have demonstrated the value of long-term mission relationships. Remember our experiences with all the mission teams, exchange visits, consultations, the modeling of faith and Wesleyan holistic ministries, Bible classes, theological education and leadership development. Consider how all of this has empowered our brothers and sisters in Eurasia to take their emerging church to the next level with their own practical vision and their own road map to the future. It has been a unique opportunity to help encourage and facilitate these partnerships and to share in this remarkable journey with all of you."

As for his seven years of commitment to the Russia Initiative, he said: "I have a love for the program that will not stop. One Russian pastor recently wrote to me. She said, 'God does not recognize pensioners, God

has only children.' I told her, 'I will always claim you as a sister in Christ.' You cannot give up a relationship like that."

The Russia Initiative, "one of the largest and most exciting mission initiatives, is growing and changing leadership and forging ahead," said the Rev. Patrick Friday, director of In Mission Together, a network of new places for new people in The United Methodist Church.

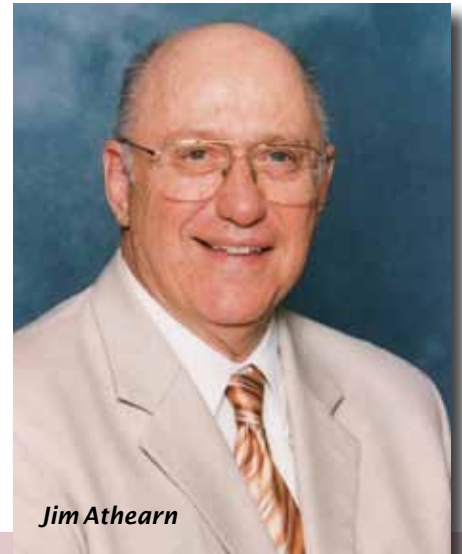
Incoming Russia Initiative Part-



nership coordinator, David McLaurin from Dallas, Texas, will continue the leadership and connection

between United Methodist churches in the U.S. and Russia. He is lay leader and staff member of Lovers Lane UMC, which began its connection with the Russian community in Volgograd in 1993, assisting in humanitarian projects that have led to new churches.

The special claim between brothers and sisters through the United Methodist connection in the U.S. and Russia began in the 1990s with



Jim Athearn

*(Below): Russians, Ukrainians, Georgians and Americans join together in prayer with Jim Athearn (shown under arrow, speaking) at a Russia Initiative meeting in April in Oklahoma City. (Photo by Holly McCray, editor of Contact, magazine of the Oklahoma Conference.)*



people-to-people, faith-based diplomacy replacing the stalemate of indifference and even animosity left by the Cold War. "It was an amazing kind of connectivity in those early years. And now some of our partners are celebrating 15 to 20 years of love and compassion," Athearn said.

The next large gathering of the Russia Initiative will be held in 2013 in Memphis. □

— General Board of Global Ministries

# UMVIM team, including five Virginians, visits Gypsy settlement in Hungary

by Nancy Hyle

**T**his past summer, eight individuals answered God's call and journeyed from the Petersburg District to Kurtospuszta, Hungary, to experience God's love through rich and powerful fellowship.

The United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) team came from various conferences and states and met at Obuda United Methodist Church in Budapest. Five came from Virginia: Milton Martin, a city planner from Hopewell; team leader Ken Carty, a retired insurance broker from Dolphin; Rodney Hunter, pastor at Wesley Memorial UMC in Richmond; Douglas Child, a retired dairy farmer from Broadnax; and Vickie Brewer, a teacher from Pennington Gap. Also on the team were Evelyn Fitzgerald, a nurse from Wilmington, N.C., and Tom Hyle, a retired NASA engineer and teacher, and his wife Nancy, a writer, both from Texas.

The purpose of the mission, the first of its kind, was to go to the remote Gypsy (also known as Romani) village of Kurtospuszta, a rural area in Hungary located about 200 kilometers from Budapest and 15 kilometers from the city of Kaposvar, consisting of 25 small, old houses and a bus stop. The team goals were to exchange testimonies and witness of God's love and work in our various cultures, conduct Vacation Bible School (VBS) for the children; hold English classes for eager learners; hold nightly worship services for the community; and build a drainage system to prevent further water damage to the mission.

To our amazement, God blessed us in fulfilling all of our goals and objectives. The theme of the Vacation Bible School was: "This is My Story, This is My Song." Each morning approximately 30 children, ages 6-18, heard Bible stories, sang faith songs, and saw skits of biblical characters, such as Joseph, Ruth, Esther and others. Vickie Brewer kept the children mesmerized with her creative skills in

*(Top right): It took a lot of teamwork to dig the ditch for the drainage system at the Gypsy settlement's mission church. (Center right): The Rev. Rodney Hunter and some of the Romani youths load a wheelbarrow with rocks for the drainage ditch. (Bottom right): Rev. Hunter speaks to the Gypsy children during Vacation Bible School.*

arts and crafts. She made the daily Bible study come alive as they made items reflective of each day's lessons.

In the afternoon, Ken, Tom and Evelyn taught classes in English. In such a limited time, the children didn't become interpreters, but they mastered some key phrases and terms which they proudly demonstrated each day. Milton, Doug, Ken and Rodney spoke for the nightly services. With the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray that each message is still working to empower and encourage our brothers, sisters and children in Kurtospuszta whom many look down upon as the worthless of society. One evening six young Gypsy teenagers came to have a personal relationship with God.

In addition to sharing in worship and VBS activities, the construction project was also completed. Everyone worked hard to finish this project in five days.

This trip would not have been possible without the invitation of Hungary's District Superintendent Istvar Csernak and his wife, Eva, who reside in Budapest and visited the Petersburg District in 2009. While in Kurtospuszta, Pastor Zoltan Kurdi, his wife and son made us feel at home in every way. Kurdi pastors churches in



Kaposvar and serves as a volunteer in the Gypsy village church. He and the interpreters are also great musicians and singers. We rejoiced, celebrated and even danced in the Spirit during worship each evening. Pastor Kurdi's farewell remarks struck a chord in our hearts when he said: "You could have sent a post card, but instead, you came." We were blessed, and learned so much from this loving community in Kurtospuszta. □

— Nancy Hyle is a writer from Texas and, along with her husband, was part of the UMVIM team that traveled to Hungary.

## Multicultural ministry

# New creative worship for children and youth involves drums, storytelling

by Deborah Austin

A new way to worship called “Hands-On Worship” is being developed at Immanuel UMC in Annandale. Truly it has emerged as a gift from God! Initially our congregation was led to take on drum ministry as a way to connect with people of the neighborhood, especially their children and youth. In time, we began to realize the humble drum could readily serve the gospel by enabling hands-on worship for God’s people.

It’s worship that:

- helps people to focus on God’s Word through rhythm and repetition;
- allows worshipers to take part in the preaching of the sermon;
- invites people to move from passive ways of worship to more active ways;
- empowers people to worship God with all of their being (through drumming and liturgical movement);
- brings clergy and laity together in planning worship and crafting the sermon;
- celebrates the Spirit’s breaking down of barriers;
- introduces the elements of play and spontaneity in worship – as worship-

ers interact with each other;

- can be high-energy, if the rhythm style being employed is high-energy. However, the energy can also be toned down through the usage of more contemplative and slower rhythms;
- includes traditional aspects of worship: sacrament, prayer, creed, liturgy, singing, benediction.

The process of developing worship is a curious thing. It is not a project that human beings can just plan and devise and carry out, for worship is God’s territory. We found we could put forward our ideas, but then we had to watch and see what God was doing with the ideas. It always amazes and humbles us when God’s Spirit shows up in these services of worship. And truly God’s Spirit does come and bless us.

The church is seeking to offer worship that draws people in, worship that nurtures people in the Good News of the Gospel, worship that makes disciples of Jesus Christ. What God is providing here is worship that is especially compelling for families. Children and youth, along with their parents,

like how this worship engages them. This worship is also helpful for a group of worshipers who want to experience unity in the Spirit – across not only age and cultural differences, but also viewpoint and opinion. As the worship focuses the hearts of the people on God’s Word, the Spirit comes and brings unity.

People will find in this worship a development of the African art of storytelling – punctuating certain words and phrases with rhythm and repetition and playfulness. We asked, “Why not isolate and celebrate the words of the Gospel?” The sermon is a telling of a Bible story. Worshipers are invited to drum (on hand drums or their thighs) selected phrases from the story being told. Our master drummer leads people with the rhythms and the repetitions and invites them to jam at different points.

Part of what is at play here is the heightening of the worship learning process by adding the hands. Learning that takes place through our hands and through the movement of our bodies is called “kinesthetic” learning. In regular worship, people tend to learn mainly through their ears and eyes and mouths. Indeed, it is very powerful for people to encounter the Gospel not only with their seeing and hearing and speaking, but also with the dimension of the employment of their hands. As we worship together, we find that worshipers are experiencing an abandonment of self and freedom in the Holy Spirit as their hands and souls get caught up in the rhythm.

It is our Methodist roots and traditions that have influenced the unfolding of this vision. What would John Wesley say about worshiping with drums? Indeed, the drums also allow us to worship with hearts filled with God’s Spirit. Perhaps Wesley would advise, “Drum steadily and with abandon.” □

– The Rev. Deborah Austin is pastor of Immanuel UMC in Annandale.



People of all ages and cultural backgrounds participated in Immanuel UMC’s first Story Drum Worship service, held on Pentecost Sunday.

# Conference videographer wins two awards

Virginia Conference Communications videographer Pheath (pronounced "Peeth") Ram won two certificates of merit for his two videos on "All Things New" at the annual gathering of United Methodist Association of Communicators (UMAC) held in Albuquerque, N.M., in October.

Ram won for two videos prepared to educate local churches on the conference's "All Things New" core strategy. The two award-winning videos were "Invitation to Harvest" and "Fruitful and Multiplying."

Ram has worked in the conference Communications office for eight years, and expanded his original information technology job description into creat-

ing videos for conference programs. Born in Cambodia, Ram's family immigrated to the United States when he was a young child.

The Rev. Larry Hollon was honored by UMAC as the 2011 Communicator of the Year. In announcing the award, Greg Nelson of the Oregon-Idaho Conference said Hollon "has spoken about the theological foundation for the ministry and the strategic value that all of us, as



**Pheath Ram video-tapes interviews with various conference leaders at a 5 Talent Academy event.**

communicators, bring to the church."

Hollon, chief executive of United Methodist Communications, received the award during an evening that also saw two veteran communicators inducted into the United Methodist Communicators' Hall of Fame and a diverse group of communicators from around the church recognized for their work during the past year.


Since becoming United Methodist Communications' chief executive in 2000, Hollon has overseen the creation of more than \$40 million in advertising to raise public awareness of The United Methodist Church. He was pivotal in the denomination's becoming a founding partner in Nothing But Nets, a grassroots campaign to save lives by preventing malaria, as well as developing Imagine No Malaria, a churchwide effort to raise \$75 million and end deaths and suffering in Africa from malaria by 2015.

More than 40 communicators received awards of excellence and certificates of merit recognizing their work in digital and print production, writing, photography, graphic design and public relations. Nine best-of-class awards recognized the top entries. Ninety-six communicators from local churches, annual conferences and denominational agencies attended the Oct. 18-21 meeting, including United Methodist communicators from Uganda and Cote d'Ivoire.

Next year's UMAC meeting will be held Oct. 17-20, 2012, in Arlington at the Hyatt Regency Crystal City. □

— Kathy Noble, Interpreter magazine

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# Historical Society makes 'road trip' to sites protected by Brunswick Circuit Foundation

**R**ather than gather for its fall board meeting in Glen Allen as usual, 40 Virginia Conference Historical Society trustees and guests traveled to Boydton, in southern Virginia near the North Carolina state line, on Oct. 6. The objective of the trip was to support the efforts of the Society-initiated Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation to preserve and interpret three sites of significance for Virginia's (and the denomination's) United Methodist heritage.

Meeting first at Boydton UMC, the group heard attorney Walter Beales explain how the Foundation is acquiring 15 acres of the original 1832 Randolph-Macon College campus, including the surviving portion of the main building, with the goal of stabilizing the structure, interpreting the site, and seeking creative suggestions for long-term use of the acreage.

Following the relocation of the college to Ashland after the Civil War, the buildings housed a freedman's school

and then Boydton Academy and Bible Institute, serving African-Americans. After viewing a video focusing on the historical and architectural significance of the several surviving campus buildings, the group drove a mile west of the church to view the campus itself.

As a conclusion to the day, some of the members made the 45-minute trip east to view the two-story 1790s Edward Dromgoole house, which has been wrapped in a protective covering to forestall further deterioration. It is believed to be the only extant house of a Virginia circuit rider, and was often visited by Francis Asbury. Here, too, stabilization is an initial objective, with possible future adaptive usage and interpretation.

The third Foundation-protected site consists of the foundation of the late 18th-century Ebenezer Academy, the first educational structure erected by Virginia Methodists, located near the town of Warfield.



*Remains of the original 1832 Randolph-Macon College building in Boydton.*

These three sites suggest the geographical scope and historical significance of the early Brunswick Circuit, and the conference Historical Society lauds the efforts of the Foundation to raise the funds and expend the energy required to preserve this rich heritage for generations to follow.

Anyone interested in making a donation to these efforts to preserve Methodist and Virginia history can send contributions to the Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation, P.O. Box 385, Lawrenceville, VA 23868-0385. □

*— Steve Mansfield, chair of the Virginia Conference Historical Society*

## Give A Tax Deductible Gift Before Time Runs Out

The end of the year is fast approaching. There are a number of ways to make an end-of-year gift that provides you with valuable benefits and helps further our work. A few options to consider include:

- **Make a Deductible Gift of Cash**
- **Make a Deductible Gift of Property and Avoid Tax**
- **Make a Deductible Gift and Receive Life Income**

Please contact us for information on how end-of-year gifts and other charitable tax planning options may give you positive tax and income benefits.



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THE VIRGINIA UNITED METHODIST FOUNDATION

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dealtompkins@vaumc.org  
804-521-1120



# Upcoming Events – for all ages!

## DECEMBER

**'Walk to the Manger' and retreats for all ages, Dec. 16-17.** Camp Overlook, Keezletown. Register for the census, become a shepherd, hear the angels proclaim the good news, visit a young couple and their special child and help point three kings toward the treasure they seek. Overlook Retreat and Camp Ministry in Keezletown presents an interactive Nativity from 6 to 8 p.m., Friday, Dec. 16. Tours start continuously, and are the perfect way to reflect on why we celebrate Christmas. Youth groups can visit the holy family and then enjoy an overnight experience in newly renovated cabins before a Saturday morning tubing trip at \$52/person. Individuals, couples and families can stay overnight at the bed and breakfast at Blessings Lodge after their trip through Bethlehem. Cost: \$99 per room (bedding for four or more on the floor). For more details and registration information for both overnight events, call the camp office at (540) 2MY-CAMP, or e-mail <campoverlook@gmail.com>.

**Winter Camp, Dec. 27-28.** Camp Overlook, Keezletown. 6 p.m. Tuesday through 6 p.m. Wednesday. The stars are never brighter and the fireplace is never more delightful than winter on Camp Overlook's side of the mountain. Open to 4th- through 10th-graders, bring a friend and join in camp activities with a winter twist and a Christmas flavor. The program is staffed by counselors and staff from summer camp. Highlights: "Walk to Manger Christmas Experience," "Jumbo Christmas Cranium," favorite camp games like "Gladiator Ball," sugar cookie decorating. Cost: \$48 registration fee includes snacks on Tuesday, breakfast, lunch and snacks on Wednesday, and program materials (\$5 discount per child for two or more from each family).

## FEBRUARY 2012

**United Methodist Day at General Assembly, Feb. 2.** State Capitol, Richmond. This annual event in its 20th year is for all United Methodists concerned with issues before the Virginia General Assembly. Sponsored by the Virginia Conference Board of Church and Society, conference Legislative Network and United Methodist Women, UM Day gives congregations a vehicle for reaching beyond themselves and introduces them to the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church in a meaningful way. **Early bird registration and payment of \$20/person must be received by Friday, Jan. 20.** After that date, registration will be \$30 and no refunds will be available. More information is available in the "Events" section of the Web at <www.vaumc.org>.

**'Celebrate Your Marriage' Retreat, Feb. 10-12.** Camp Overlook, Keezletown. Grow in your love and commitment to God and one another. Join with other married couples to enrich your relationship in the context of Christian faith and action. Trained leaders will guide participants through a series of exercises, activities and worship experiences. For more information, call the camp office at (540) 2MY-CAMP or e-mail <campoverlook@gmail.com>.

## APRIL 2012

**'ReFirement: A Creative Spark' for Older Adults, April 20-21.** Blackstone Conference and Retreat Center. Sponsored by the conference Older Adult Council, this retreat will focus on fostering the spark of creativity in order to enrich the lives of older adults and enhance the ministries of the church. Workshops include watercolor and acrylic painting, music, liturgical movement and knitting/crocheting for making prayer shawls. Fellowship opportunities also will be available. Why attend a retreat focused on the arts? A resolution to the 2005 White House Conference on

Aging stated: "Research suggests that active participation in the arts and learning promotes physical health, enhances a sense of well-being among older Americans, improves quality of life for those who are ill, and reduces the risk factors that lead to the need for long-term care..." More information will be available after the start of the year from the conference office of Leadership and Inclusivity.

## MAY 2012

**Festival of Homiletics, May 14-18.** Atlanta. The Virginia Conference Order of Elder encourages all pastors to consider attending this week of preaching and teaching. The festival is the premier training event in preaching in the country. A link is provided on the Virginia Conference Web site to help connect clergy who want to carpool to Atlanta. Registration information is available on the Web at <www.vaumc.org> in the "Events" section. **Early registration ends Jan. 31.** Scholarships may be requested through the Virginia Conference Clergy Development program. An application and instructions may be accessed from <www.vaumc.org>, click "Administrative Services >> Ministerial Services >> Clergy Development." The next deadline is Feb. 10.

## JUNE 2012

**United Nations Seminar, June 25-29.** New York City. An exploration of social justice issues and systemic causes (locally and globally), this trip will help young people ages 16-22 discover a passion to change the world. Sponsored by the General Board of Global Ministries, seminars are presented for a minimum of 15 people. The goal is to register at least 15 participants by January. The exact cost has not yet been determined as final details are being set, but it is estimated to be approximately \$800/person. If you are interested, e-mail Becky Tate in the conference office of Ministries with Young People at <beckytate@vaumc.org>.



# Nation & World

## Bishops endorse church restructure proposals

**U**nited Methodist bishops have voted overwhelmingly in favor of proposals to restructure the denomination and redistribute up to \$60 million in church funds.

The vote at the Council of Bishops' November meeting specifically endorsed a letter, titled "For the Sake of a New World, We See a New Church: A Call to Action," detailing changes — some requiring action by General Conference, some not.

"We see a new church," the bishops' letter says. "It is a church that is clear about its mission and confident about its future, a church that is always reaching out, inviting, alive, agile and resilient." It asks all United Methodists to "work to do the 'new thing' God intends for our church and discover the path God is making for our future."

The Council of Bishops' vote came as part of the multiyear "Call to Action" process, which aims to reverse decades of declining membership and financial giving in the United States and to increase congregational vitality.

With their vote, the bishops endorsed the proposed consolidation of nine of the denomination's 13 general agencies into a new United Methodist Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry. Legislation submitted to General Conference by the Connectional Table calls for the center to have a 15-member board of directors accountable to a 45-member advisory board called the General Council for Strategy and Oversight. The council would replace the Connectional Table, which coordinates the denomination's mission, ministries and resources.



*Bishop Elaine Stanovsky of the Denver Area raises a question during discussion of the Interim Operations Team proposal at the Council of Bishops' meeting at Lake Junaluska, N.C. (UMNS photo by Ronny Perry)*

The vote came after two days of discussions among the bishops in private conversations, small groups and plenary sessions. Even as many bishops stood up to commend the letter, they also said there were parts they would tweak if they could. "I don't agree with everything" was a frequent refrain.

However, many bishops insisted The United Methodist Church needs some kind of reform.

Iowa Area Bishop Julius Trimble likened the letter to a global positioning system (GPS) that can guide drivers toward their destination even if it doesn't always get them to the exact address.

"We cannot get where we want to go without some form of a GPS, and we certainly aren't going to get close without leaving the house," Trimble told his colleagues to murmurs of agreement.

Bishops also acknowledged that General Conference, the denomination's top lawmaking body, likely

would alter the legislation. General Conference will next convene April 24-May 4 in Tampa, Fla.

The Council of Bishops and Connectional Table initiated the "Call to Action" process "to reorder the life of the church" two years ago in the wake of the 2008 global economic crisis.

At its fall 2010 meeting, the council endorsed the "Call to Action" recommendations and the "adaptive challenge" to redirect resources toward fostering vital congregations. The suggested structural changes the bishops took up this year

originated with the Interim Operations Team (IOT), a group of eight laity and clergy working with denominational leadership to implement the "Call to Action" recommendations.

Illinois Area Bishop Greg Palmer, the Interim Operations Team convenor, asked the bishops to "embrace and affirm" the team's work.

In showing their approval, he said the bishops would be showing "our commitment to lead the church" and use the changes as "instruments in service to vision and mission."

Palmer also stressed that more than 50 percent of the work the bishops need to do to foster vital congregations does not require General Conference legislation.

Bishops do not vote at General Conference, nor do they address the assembly on legislative matters without special permission. However, there are no limits on conversations with delegates and other church members outside the sessions.

In addition to endorsing restructur-

ing and allowing the redistribution of up to \$60 million in general church funds, the bishops, in the letter, urge General Conference to give annual conferences more freedom in how they organize, allow the election of a nonresidential bishop to serve as president of the Council of Bishops and provide support for collecting consistent information from all annual conferences about their financial practices.

The council said it favors adopting stronger and more transparent measures and procedures for the accountability of bishops. The bishops also said they would work with appropriate general church offices, seminary leadership and annual conference boards of ordained ministry to strengthen support for United Methodist seminaries, address curriculum requirements and clarify expectations.

The bishops said their annual conferences will strive to improve “recruitment and support of the most fruitful and effective young clergy” and strengthen clergy recruitment, formation and the appointment process to improve vitality.

The bishops’ vote, by a show of hands, included a handful of “no” votes. The dissenting voices included Denver Area Bishop Elaine Stanovsky. After the vote, she said she would have preferred that the bishops could have registered their support for each

### ***In their letter, the bishops urge General Conference to:***

- Give annual conferences freedom to organize their structures for greater fruitfulness.
- Permit the mid-quadrennium reallocation of up to \$60 million from the general church funds for creating and increasing vital congregations.
- Provide for the Council of Bishops to elect a nonresidential bishop as council president to help reform the council and focus its energies on core challenges.
- Create a United Methodist Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry under one board of directors to combine the functions of the Connectional Table and nine general agencies: the Board of Church and Society, Board of Global Ministries, Board of Discipleship, Board of Higher Education and Ministry, Commission on Archives and History, Council on Finance and Administration, Commission on Religion and Race, Commission on the Status and Role of Women and United Methodist Communications.
- Move the functions of the church’s ecumenical agency, the Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, to an office of the Council of Bishops.
- Set aside United Methodist Women and United Methodist Men as self-funded, official membership-based organizations.

legislative proposal individually.

Other bishops also voiced concerns, while some doubted how much effect the changes, if adopted, would have.

Pittsburgh Area Bishop Tom Bickerton asked what essential functions would be lost if \$60 million that would ordinarily go to general agencies over the next four years would be redistributed.

The proposed legislation would authorize the board of the newly created center to allocate \$5 million to theological education in central conferences outside the United States, \$5 million for young people’s lay leadership development, and \$50 million for recruiting and training United Methodist ministerial students under the age of 35 and increasing vital congregations.

The Rev. Karen Greenwaldt, the Board of Discipleship’s top executive, told the council it is not yet clear exactly what the impact would be on ministries of the general agencies, but the impact could be severe. Agencies already face a more than 6 percent cut in their funding under the 2013-16 budget of \$603 million, which the General Council on Finance and Administration has submitted to General Conference. Potentially, the redistribution could mean an additional loss in funding of almost 10 percent.

“The list (of possible cuts in programming) is long and extensive, and, depending on priorities and decisions made by folks after General Conference, we would have to make those very critical decisions,” Greenwaldt said, referring to her own agency’s work.

A number of bishops said they felt they could put the funds to better use at the annual conference and local church level.

After the vote, Washington Area Bishop John Schol – who leads the bishops’ Vital Congregations Initiative – said he thinks overall the changes will better align the denomination to support vital congregations. “Those are the congregations that are growing over time, reaching out to their communities, and they are engaging more of their laity in ministry,” he said. “Some of the changes we talked about today are legislative, but there’s far more change that’s really about leadership at all levels of the church – bishops, general agency staff, local congregations – all beginning to say we’re going to do something different,” he said. □

– Heather Hahn,  
United Methodist News Service



***Bishop Eben Nhwatiwa of the Africa Central Conference pins an IOT proposal on the chart at Council of Bishops meeting in November. (UMNS photo by Ronny Perry)***

# German Bishop Rosemarie Wenner is first woman outside of United States elected to lead Council

**B**ishop Rosemarie Wenner of Germany will be the next president of the Council of Bishops, marking the first time a woman from outside the United States will lead the global body.

The council on Nov. 2 unanimously elected Wenner president, and Bishop Warner Brown Jr. of the California-Nevada Conference as the president-designate.

Wenner will start her two-year term on the third day of General Conference, the denomination's top-lawmaking body. Brown will succeed her in 2014.

Bishop Larry Goodpaster, the Council of Bishops president now, said he thinks Wenner will bring "a great spirit" to her new role. Goodpaster has worked closely with Wenner in the past two years during her time as president-designate.

"She has a great grasp of United Methodism around the world and is just a wonderful person to work with," said Goodpaster, who leads the Western North Carolina Conference. "I think she brings some really positive leadership to the whole church."

The council president is responsible for presiding over the bishops' executive committee and the twice-yearly council meetings. Goodpaster said the president has a responsibility to guide the bishops in their deliberations and remind them of their mission to make disciples.

Only General Conference can speak officially for The United Methodist Church. However, the council president sometimes is called on to speak to journalists and others within and outside the denomination on behalf of the bishops and church teachings.

The president also often takes a leading role in council initiatives. Goodpaster, Wenner and Illinois Area Bishop Gregory Palmer, Goodpaster's predecessor as president, all have been involved in the denomination's Call to Action process, aimed at fostering more vital congregations.

Wenner said she hopes to lead the council and her fellow United Methodists by "modeling what it means to be a Christian."

She has asked her fellow bishops for prayer and support. "I am trusting in my colleagues because it is a team effort," she told United Methodist News Service.

The council presidency typically rotates around representatives from each of the five U.S. jurisdictions and a representative from the central conferences — church regions in Africa, Europe and the Philippines. Council presidents have come from outside the United States before. Bishop Emilio de Carvalho of Angola, for example, who served from 1991 to 1992, was the first African bishop in that position.

The Council of Bishops also elected other officers.

- Oklahoma Area Bishop Robert Hayes Jr. was re-elected for a third time as the council secretary.
- Boston Area Bishop Peter Weaver, who will retire next year, will serve a four-year term as the council's executive secretary starting in September 2012.
- Los Angeles Area Bishop Mary Ann Swenson, who also will retire next year, will serve a four-year term as the council's ecumenical officer starting in September 2012.

Wenner, 56, is a trailblazer in her own way. When she was elected bishop of Germany in February 2005, she became the denomination's first woman to be named to the episcopacy outside the United States.

"I hope just the fact I am coming from the central conferences is seen as a sign that the church lives in this reality of a global church," Wenner said.



**Bishop Rosemarie Wenner will be the first woman from outside the United States to preside over the Council of Bishops. (UMNS photo by Ronny Perry)**

Only in working together as a global church, she said, will United Methodists fulfill the church's calling from God.

Wenner grew up in Eppingen, a village in southwestern Germany, and was nurtured by a small United Methodist congregation. She studied at the United Methodist Theological Seminary in Reutlingen and served as pastor of congregations in Karlsruhe-Durlach, Hockenheim and Darmstadt-Sprendlingen before her appointment as superintendent of the Frankfurt District in 1996. She and her husband, Tobias Wenner, live in Nussloch, Germany.

Bishop Gaspar Joao Domingos of West Angola said Wenner's election to the council presidency shows that the central conferences have values they can share with the global church.

"It also will be a great joy that from a central conference context, it will be the first woman presiding, and that is a context that is dominated by men," said Domingos through an interpreter. □

— Heather Hahn,  
United Methodist News Service

# \$3 million grant boosts anti-malaria campaign

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, in collaboration with the United Nations Foundation, has given a \$3 million grant to the Imagine No Malaria campaign of The United Methodist Church.

Pittsburgh Area Bishop Tom Bickerton, the campaign's spokesperson, said the grant would provide administrative support to help the church reach its \$75 million fundraising goal. To date, more than \$15 million has been raised for Imagine No Malaria.

"It gives us a boost in the next phase of the campaign," Bickerton said.

The Rev. Larry Hollon, top staff executive of United Methodist Communications, explained that the gift "will allow us to pursue our renewed strategy to present Imagine No Malaria to the annual conferences and local churches with new energy and with staff support (and) help us to follow through on philanthropic gifts."

Tangible results on the ground in Africa, Bickerton said, will include expanded work in Angola and Zimbabwe and replicating the successful model developed in Sierra Leone. "We're really expanding our implementation across the continent," he explained.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo – an area Bickerton calls "the heartbeat of malaria" – the church has cooperated informally with UNICEF and is negotiating to work with various organizations in remote sections of the country. "You talk about the church going where the road ends, we have hospitals and clinics with no roads to them in Congo," he said.

When Bickerton told the November meeting of the United Methodist Council of Bishops about the \$3 million grant, Sierra Leone Area Bishop John Yambasu applauded the church's efforts against the No. 1 killer of children in Africa. "The United Methodist Church is providing armor in this fight against the killer disease we call

malaria," he said.

For Shannon Trilli, director of the malaria initiative of the United Methodist Committee on Relief, the active participation of the African bishops

techniques.

This credibility has led to attention from groups working on international health issues, such as the Gates and U.N. foundations.

"We're seen across the world as a pretty integral part of this whole

thing because of the delivery system the church provides," Bickerton said.

Imagine No Malaria was the only faith-based group to be invited to the Oct. 18 Malaria Forum sponsored by the Gates Foundation, where Melinda Gates saluted the campaign.

What is exciting to Bickerton, he said, is the progress made against malaria deaths over the past few years. A child now dies of malaria in Africa every 45 seconds instead of every 30 seconds, he said, and the annual number of deaths worldwide – already on the decrease – is projected to drop from 800,000 in 2010 to 100,000 in 2015. □

— Linda Bloom,  
United Methodist News Service



and their church members is what makes the campaign unique.

Since 2008, the United Methodist annual conferences in Africa have strived to create health boards that provide both a sense of ownership and mechanisms for accountability.

"They (health boards) already are performing at extremely high levels," Trilli said. "Their programs have results that are comparable, if not better, than any agencies out there."

Faith-based organizations also have people and infrastructure in remote communities that other organizations can't reach, she pointed out. Because these organizations are trusted, communities are more willing to absorb information about malaria-prevention



Sierra Leonian volunteers with The United Methodist Church's Imagine No Malaria campaign hang a mosquito net at a home in Koribondo Village near Bo, Sierra Leone, in this December 2010 photo. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has approved a \$3 million grant for the church's efforts. (UMNS file photo by Mike DuBose)



# Local Church



▲ Members of **Main Street UMC** in Suffolk have developed a unique and original stewardship campaign for 2012 called “Seeding for Fruitfulness.” It includes all ages and uses the apple as a symbol. The children’s section is based on the book, *Stuart’s Ship* and teaches “deep truths for tender hearts.” The choir sang original words to the tune of “The Good Ship Lollipop” as Stuart’s Ship, full of apples (pictured with some of the church’s children), sailed into the church to kick off the stewardship campaign.



▲ United Methodist Men created a garden at **Sunset Drive UMC** in Broadway. They harvested (with help from volunteers from the church) 42 bushels of potatoes, 36 dozen ears of corn, and a peck of carrots and beets. They are currently growing turnips. All of what was grown was donated to local food banks.

**First UMC** in Hampton, York River District, hosted a Stop Hunger Now event Oct. 8, where 77 enthusiastic volunteers gathered and experienced being in mission first-hand. The needed \$2,500 for shipping was raised through the Lenten offering, Vacation Bible School (teaching children about mission) and individual contributions. Just over 10,000 packets were completed, which will be shipped to the Horn of Africa – Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya – where they are having the worst drought and famine in 60 years.



▲ **Calloway UMC** youths participated in the Southeastern Jurisdiction of the Black Methodists for Church Renewal’s annual Harambee 2011 mission retreat. This event was attended by predominately African-American United Methodist churches from Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida and Texas. Approximately 400 teens between the ages of 12-18 attended, celebrating God’s love in daily worship and seminars. Teens enjoyed socializing and making lifelong friendships that have been blessed by the Spirit. Calloway UMC, Arlington District, had the largest single church attendance, with 16 teens and two chaperones.



▲ Scouts David Forman and Sam Towler of **Main Street UMC** in Suffolk were presented the God and Church Award on Oct. 23. The two Troop 1 Life Scouts earned the award after completing a four-month program. The goal of the curriculum is to strengthen a middle school-aged Scout’s relationship with Christ. As a part of the course work they learned about and participated in worship services and varied ministries of the church. They also did Bible studies, learning how the readings apply to living in today’s world. Some of the other parts of the course included daily Bible readings and memorizing the Apostle’s Creed.



▲ **Zion UMC** in Seaford, York River District, hosted a new members’ reception Oct. 16. During the food and fellowship event, church leaders presented information about the various facets of church work, including Discipleship Council and other mission opportunities. Pictured (from left) are Shawn and Robyne Patterson, with Christopher and David, Pete and Debbie Hargis, and Geraldine Snap.



▲ Senior Pastor Sylvia Meadows and director of Hospitality Martha Taylor of **Farmville UMC** participated in the downtown Halloween parade for children, passing out jelly bracelets and information cards with upcoming ministry opportunities within the church. They came in contact with more than 700 children.



▲ United Methodist Women (from left) Susan Trivett, Jackie Fuss and Marge Lewis of **Watson Memorial UMC** in Chatham took on the mission of providing homemade winter hats for the homeless. The hats were donated to the Salvation Army.



▲ Thirteen members from **St. Peter's UMC** in Montpelier recently spent four days on Cheyenne River Reservation, Eagle Butte, S.D. to serve the Lakota people on a mission trip. The team, whose ages ranged from 5-64, painted, built a deck, catalogued library books, weeded gardens, cleaned windows and held "Kid's Club." More importantly, they built relationships with new friends, who saw Jesus through the actions of the team from Virginia.

## Carsley UMC celebrates its bicentennial

**Carsley UMC** celebrated its 200th anniversary on Oct. 9. Located at the intersection of Carsley Road and Otterdam Road in Surry County, the church is a part of the Surry Charge, which includes the Surry, Dendron and Oak Grove churches. The pastor of the charge is the Rev. Ray Rowland, who has served the churches for 22 years and is an integral part of the close-knit community.

Carsley UMC has church services twice monthly and Sunday school every Sunday. It is one of the oldest continually operating churches in the county.

The 200th anniversary service and celebration brought approximately 175 people to the small country church. The Rev. Sam Askew was the guest speaker. He served the Carsley church from 1983-1987. He delighted the congregation with area stories from the past as he ministered to them with music and the speaking of God's Word. After the service, the crowd enjoyed lunch on the lawn.

Carsley UMC remains a strong and dedicated church with about 70 members. On any given Sunday, you may find 7-15 in attendance. According to Rev. Rowland, "It's small and they love the Lord and give their very best." A center for the community, activities abound. From "Carsley Day," an outreach picnic with games, music and Halloween parties, to the making of homemade Brunswick stew and barbeque, something is always going on at the church. A charge-wide youth and younger children's group provides activities for the kids. To be so small and remote from city life, Carsley UMC is a happening rural place.

Carsley is indeed historic. The congregation began to form around 1790. On Nov. 11, 1811, William Carsley sold an acre of land to the trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and a church building was constructed. The current church building was built in 1897, and is reported to be the third church on the site. The first two buildings were lost to fire. The 1897 building is intact, complete with the original pews, pine floors and imported windows. ▼



*The current Carsley UMC building was constructed in 1897, the third church building on the site, after the first two were lost to fire.*



▲ Members from **Louisa, Lasley, Ebenezer and Mount Horeb UMCs** hosted a hospitality area at the Louisa County Agricultural Fair in late July. Temperatures hovering near 100 degrees brought appreciative fairgoers to the area for free ice water. An entertainment area for young children allowed hot and tired parents to rest in a fan-cooled seating area. Volunteer hosts provided literature on all Louisa County United Methodist churches, where they would find "Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors."

*(More Local Church news continued on pg. 29)*

## Conference offices close for Christmas

Offices in the Virginia United Methodist Center in Glen Allen will close at 1 p.m. Friday, Dec. 23, and will remain closed all day Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, Dec. 26-28, in observance of the Christmas holidays. Offices will reopen Thursday, Dec. 29.



# Living the Word



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** *The Rev. Meredith McNabb serves as one of the pastors at Grace United Methodist Church in the Alexandria District, where she received her first appointment in 2007. Before entering ordained ministry, she served as an attorney in Virginia, working with low-income victims of domestic violence and elderly persons. Meredith holds a bachelor's degree in Economics from the University of Virginia, a J.D. from the Washington & Lee University School of Law and an M.Div. from Candler School of Theology at Emory University. When she's not at church, she is a traveler and a cook, and she lives in Manassas with her beagle mutt, Ginny.*

**December 4, 2011**

*God does it*  
**Genesis 12:1-9**

**G**rowing up, my family moved every few years, and, as a child, I always thought that it was my big chance to reinvent myself. With every moving truck headed across the country, I'd think, "This time, I'll be really cool!" And for a week or two, the pretense would hold... but then my true colors would show, and I would settle back into being the awkward, geeky kid that I was.

As a young adult, I kept on moving from place to place, but I had figured out that reinvention wasn't automatic. I still figured I could do it, though, if I worked hard. Each move was a chance to set out to be someone new and improved – a new opportunity, a new degree, a new job, a new house. Each time, I could be a little better, a little greater than before, and for a month or so after each leap, I felt a little greater than I had before... but it always wore off, and the new thing became just another launching point into something else.

So often, when we set out into something new, it's to build ourselves up, to chase the next dream, to make our names great – but those self-improvement efforts can have pretty shallow roots. We miss that, if the change is going to stick, it's going to be God who does the making-great. We miss that we are made by God, in all times and all places, to be a blessing for others.

When Abram receives this promise of becoming father to a great nation that exists under covenant with God, he packs his tent, gathers his possessions and sets off with inspiring trust in God. He builds altars to God

along the way, and he believes God's promise in a way that is "reckoned to him as righteousness," as both Paul and James later admire about him. But, as we'll read more next week, he goes off-track before the journey is done, forgetting that the promise of greatness is for God's own sake and only will be fulfilled by God's grace working within and around Abram – not by Abram's own ideas or efforts alone.

As we move forward in Advent this month, I imagine that, as people of faith, we are all longing to make a great journey to Christmas – one in which we don't wind up exhausted, indebted or ashamed of the materialism around us or in us, and one in which the promises of hope and peace and love through the Incarnation are made real in new ways. That's a lot! If we simply steel ourselves to launch new spiritual disciplines, to rein in our spending and scheduling and to stretch ourselves in mission, our efforts are likely to last a couple of weeks – maybe. If we and our families and communities and world are to be truly transformed in this holy season of preparation, it will take our sincere commitment *and* our profound openness to it being God who will make this season a great blessing. With God's help, may it be so for us! □

**December 11, 2011**

*Remembering and hoping*  
**Genesis 15:1-6, 12-18**

**G**athering around a campfire is one of my favorite things, but I'm not much for telling ghost stories. What I love are memory stories – the times when we recount where we've been and when we remember who we are through laughter



and through tender recollections. In my family, we laugh ruefully about our relative who really did run away to join the circus, and our hearts fill up when we remember our great-grandmother with an eighth-grade education who put three children through college despite being widowed before she was 30.

This story of Abram's faithfulness is part of those family stories that God's people tell to remember who we are in faith – and much like personal family stories, there's some good and some not-so-good to it. This is the formalization of God's promise to Abram, and God seems to be using this ritual to remind Abram who he is. Since setting out on their journey, Abram and Sarai had gotten forgetful about how to trust God. They heard the promise of descendants and land, and, seeing no progress over the years, they took matters into their own hands. Abram nearly abandoned Sarai to life in a harem in order to preserve his own life, and she tried for surrogacy through Hagar to make sure that God's promise comes true. In today's passage, the promised child is again weighing on him, and, as an old man, he seems to be getting his affairs in order, selecting an heir from among his servants – perhaps he can be the *founder* of a great nation, if not the *father* of one.

God sees this arrangement of Abram's, and one afternoon, God shows up to reassure Abram about the promises. God takes Abram outside and points up at the sky and says that his descendants will be as uncountable as the stars. The problem, though, if you read carefully, is that the sun hasn't gone down yet: What stars?

In our family stories and in our faith stories, there are high, bright mountaintop moments when God and God's promises seem to be shining all around us, and there are dark times, where the glimmers of hope and faith are all that can hold us together and give us direction. Some commentators stretch this story out over multiple days to make sure that Abram is looking at a nighttime sky,

but I think this story is full of God's truth without having to massage the timeline. Abram is standing with God in the middle of the afternoon, looking hard for the fulfillment of the promise – and God says remember the stars. God points to the sky and reminds Abram of the galaxies he's seen every night in his long life as a tent-dwelling herdsman... and the stars that he knows return again every night. God's promise will be fulfilled in God's own time and God's own way.

As we anticipate the fulfillment of God's promise in Jesus' birth, also fulfilled in God's own time, it is the blessing of the Advent season that we wait, remembering the stories of our ancestors in faith, and trusting, even before the stars come out. □

## December 18, 2011

*The best*  
**Genesis 22:1-14**

**T**his story of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac, the beloved son and the long-awaited fulfillment of God's promise, is one of the more terrifying stories of our ancestors in faith, carefully side-stepped in polite church conversation. The mystery and depth in it attracts the artists and philosophers among us, though, trying to look at it from all angles: What must Isaac have thought of all this? What did Sarah think? What on earth was Abraham thinking? We put ourselves in the story – and I, at least, end up where [American singer-songwriter] Bob Dylan did [in his 1960s hit "Highway 61"], reimagining Abraham's response to God's command as, "Man, you must be puttin' me on!" There must be some misunderstanding. This is the promised son, the best thing, the one on whom all the promises rest – and he's supposed to die?

Of course, as we prepare to celebrate the Incarnation, I hope that there's also a stirring in the backs of our minds that pulls us forward from

the manger and into Gethsemane. *This* promised one in Bethlehem on whom the hopes of the people and the prophets rest – he's also going to die.

There's a danger in reading these stories with fairy-tale thinking – where Sleeping Beauty is good and the witch is bad, and we just have to cheer for goodness and against death. God's story with us is not a fairy tale. God is madly in love with us, and God is trying to save the world. To do both of those things well is complicated and requires our best and God's best to accomplish.

In demanding and in preventing Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, God is showing what God's covenant with us looks like. God's love can't be bought, even with an enormous sacrifice. God's love is unmerited grace. God demands our very best – but, on our own, our best will always fall short of God's perfection. It's not a question of human willpower. If Abraham had soldiered through and killed his son with a grim-set jaw, it wouldn't have solved anything, and he would have become a monster. And it's not a question of human love. If Abraham had refused God and hidden Isaac, or even laid himself out on the altar, he would have put his love for Isaac above his love for God, and he would have become an idolator.

In this story, in *our* stories, we need God, plain and simple. We need God to fulfill our sacrifices and to fill in the gaps in our love. This is one of the stories that can carry the terror and anger that bubble up from our hearts when our plans and expectations crumble spectacularly. It pulls us into the real risk that God takes in loving us and becoming one of us in Jesus, and it reminds us that in the bleakest moments of human existence, there will be a ram caught in the thicket, forgiving words and an empty tomb. God has given God's own best self in self-giving love for us, and that is provision enough for all of our days. □

*(Continued on next page)*

(Continued from previous page)

## December 25, 2011

*A wise young woman*

**Luke 1:46-55**

**M**ary knows what's what, and I wish that Christmas pageants would let Mary do a little more talking! I have fond memories of being in Christmas pageants as a child, and in the congregation where I serve, I enjoy seeing the children and teenagers portray the Nativity scene, but I never remember Mary (or Joseph, either, for that matter) getting to say very much. I know it would be out-of-order for how the Bible tells the story, but what if the teenage girl playing Mary's part stood up at the end of the pageant and recited this whole speech, holding up the child or – let's be practical here, the baby doll – who is sitting in for Emmanuel, the Prince of Peace, God-With-Us? Not just the part about Mary's joy in being able to "magnify the Lord" – although that's important – but also the part about who the Lord is: the Mighty One who overturns the way the world works – sending away the rich and powerful and choosing the lowly and the hungry for particular care. Christmas visitors to churches would certainly get a new sense that maybe the celebrated fulfillment of God's promise to the whole world isn't only about a sweet girl and an honorable man and a miraculous baby. They would hear what we try to learn all year in church: that God's ways are not our ways, but God's ways are *the* way into abundant life.

Mary's response here to the new life she is nurturing is not what one might expect from a poor young woman in first-century Palestine. However, she knows that she is a part of the greatest thing God has ever done to save the world. In that knowledge, Mary seems glad to proclaim what the saved world looks like: The proud, the powerful, the rich, the comfortable and the complacent will not hold their position forever, and God's merciful grace will fill the hungry and lift up all those who are on the underside of life. This is not a sleepy, snowy, quiet joy from

Mary – this is a shout! God is doing something amazing and world-changing in the birth of Mary's son, and it is meant to be good news for people who don't hear much good news.

Christmas is a day of joy and wonder in our imaginations, and yet it is a difficult time for many. As a single person, I am grateful that serving as a pastor means that there are always numerous people who go out of their way to make sure that I have a place at a festive table for the holidays. However, there are many people who are far from family or separated from loved ones or otherwise alone on Christmas morning. Distance and divorce and death aren't a part of the sparkling romanticized version of Christmas that we see on TV, but Mary's proclamation here is that God remembers those on the outside, and God claims people who are struggling and hurting, surrounding them with the gift of grace. This Christmas day and week, that is still God's good news and God's invitation to us. □

## January 1, 2012

*Blessed to be a blessing*

**Genesis 39:5-23**

**R**emembering God's covenant to bless the world through Abraham's descendants, God's protection of Joseph is a picture of what God blessing the world looks like. Joseph is indeed blessed, even though he ends up wrongfully in jail. God formed him to be a person who could earn Potiphar's trust and gave him the moral fortitude to avoid entanglement with Potiphar's wife and the spiritual courage to face the consequences. The prison is blessed, as God's steadfast love is reflected in Joseph there, and even Potiphar's family is blessed through Joseph. Despite themselves, at least for the time being, the marriage of Potiphar and his wife is free of infidelity. Ultimately, the whole country is blessed by this squalid incident of lust and lies. Without this, Joseph would never have moved beyond being a household manager, and would never have been able to prevent famine in Egypt.

It turns out that the blessing of God doesn't protect you from injustice, doesn't keep your reputation shiny and generally does not serve as a protective bubble around your life. In fact, being one of God's blessed people seems to get Joseph into much *more* trouble than if he had simply been able to take the easy road.

Likewise for us, being people of faith means that we give time and money toward serving others that we might have enjoyed using for ourselves. Faith requires us to behave honorably in our workplaces and our relationships when it would be advantageous not to. Sometimes being people of faith means that we do the unpopular thing, or the thing that gets us fired, or even worse, in order to reflect God's steadfast love and to be a blessing for the world.

In law school, I worked in campus ministry at VMI, and one of the longtime professors there told me about Jonathan Daniels. Jonathan was the 1961 valedictorian at VMI, and he was a committed Christian who was on summer break from seminary when he traveled to Alabama as an advocate for civil rights. On Aug. 20, 1965, he and a few others, including 16-year-old Ruby Sales, attempted to buy sodas at a local grocery store. A man who was angry about desegregation leveled a shotgun at Ruby. Jonathan leaped between her and the gun and was killed instantly. The shooter was acquitted by an all-white jury, and the story of Jonathan Daniels' life and martyrdom for his faith was a galvanizing force for churches around civil rights.

Most of us will not be called upon to bless the world in such a profoundly self-giving way, but being blessed to be a blessing is never without cost. Accepting God's sure promise of steadfast love in our lives means that, while we will indeed be blessed as God leads us into lives reflecting that love, we are, like Joseph and like Jonathan, called to do the difficult thing with faith in our hearts. As this new year begins, may we be ready to accept Christ's blessing and to bless others through our lives. □

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# Letters & Commentary

## Gifts don't matter so much if they are not used in love

**T**his is the Day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it!" I awakened to those words every morning at 4 a.m. for most of my middle-school years in a small town in California. They were spoken aloud by my grandmother, with whom I shared a bedroom, and I couldn't escape her early morning prayers and hymns.

**Commentary by  
Jennifer Braaten**

My first encounter with a "spirit-filled" person was an intimate one, and it came with lasting "consequences." Grandma Hanneman belonged to a Pentecostal church at that time, and "gifts of the Spirit" were big in that denomination – things like speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing.

Not long after I was married, something happened to my grandma – she became much less judgmental and began to focus her life on the one gift of the Spirit that she had discovered was most important. This was the gift that St. Paul tells us is the most excellent one; the one to be most desired... *agape*, the special Greek word that describes the spiritual gift of self-giving love for others.

Grandma came to the conviction that all the other gifts of the Spirit listed by Paul in his letters had to be embedded in self-giving love in order for them to have any real meaning. She came to a deep belief that they were gifted to people by the Spirit to use for the sake of building up the Body of Christ in love – *agape* love, and for the transformation of the world.

Grandma's small home became a place of hospitality and love for so many, including her special guests – the former prison inmates who visited her because of the many letters she had sent to them while they were incarcerated, letters that told them that Jesus loved them, and that they were children of God like anyone else.

Now for the consequences! I still wake up at 4 each morning, and Grandma's mantra is now on my own lips and has a home within my heart. Each day starts out in this special way.

As president of Ferrum College I have the privilege of watching how so many people contribute their special gifts for the nurturing of the common good of the college community – people working with *agape* love for others; working for the sake of the whole and caring for the growth and well-being of all. Indeed, this "to-be-sought-after" spiritual gift nurtured by my grandma is well expressed in Ferrum's motto: "Not self, but others." This same communion of the Spirit empowering people with various gifts

for the sake of building up the community in *agape* love is the experience of congregation after congregation. It is the one gift of the Spirit I value above all others, as important as they all are. My prayer is that such would be the experience of the peoples and nations of the world. □

– Dr. Jennifer Braaten is president of United Methodist-related Ferrum College in Ferrum.

## Building relationships is key part of church's mission work

**T**here were a number of great mission stories printed in the October *Advocate*. A number of those stories moved me to have a new hope for our church, but there was one that really stood out for me. It was titled "Virginia Conference's new UMVIM team coordinator brings plenty of mission experience," written by our editor, Neill Caldwell. Her name is Julie Warren. Neill, along with a lot of good information about her, quoted her philosophy for doing mission work which is:

*"We need to stop doing 'mission trips' and start doing 'relationship trips.' We need to empower people in the local church, equip and inspire them and help them realize their purpose in mission... to reach people in the farthest corners of Virginia with the message that you can't get caught up in results because it's not about you. It's about building relationships with love."*

Wow! She nailed it. She took the very most important part of church, which is relationships, and moved it right into mission work.

In the farthest corners of Virginia, she and her team will undoubtedly encounter folks that will be somewhat different than they are. This moved me to reflect on what Jesus said in Matthew 5:47: "And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" In other words, Jesus is saying the church must be different from the world. It is not business as usual. The doors of the church are mandated by God to be open wide to all kinds of different people in the world. In fact, the more diversity in the church, the more the church is a sign of God's Kingdom, so long as relationships take place and that beautiful "agape" love is shared and bestowed on each person.

Another very powerful part of Julie's philosophy was when she said, "It not about you." We so much need to



# Local Church

(Continued from pg. 23)

## Ministry to support those who have lost their jobs now in its 13th year

In October, **Cave Spring UMC**, Roanoke, began the 13th year of its Back on the Path (BOP) ministry. The job loss support ministry had its start in the church parlor in 1999, meeting with church members who had lost their jobs. They are called “hikers.” Originally, the group’s main function was to concentrate on the emotional side of job loss, and to offer comfort and encouragement to those within the church family. But meeting Tuesday after Tuesday for 12 years, the group became experienced and helpful in the logistical side of the job search process. Today BOP helps church members and individuals from throughout central, southwest and southside Virginia in all phases of finding meaningful employment.

In addition to founders Al Colgrove and David Meashey, there are numerous other folks who assist in the weekly meetings held every Tuesday. The current group of “helpers” include Art Wingfield, Alice Stoddard, Bruce Prillaman, Carolyn Wagner, David Ross, Deb Squire, Ray Mengerink and Susan Geary, plus dozens of other mentors from church and community that are available for special assignments.

Additionally, BOP now has three human resource professionals, a resume expert, social networking specialist, Virginia Employment Commission leaders, recruitment contacts, government/industrial/marketing and education executives on board, in addition to the weekly-meeting advisors. Daily e-mails are sent to more than 300 people.

BOP’s “helpers” and “hikers” want to thank Cave Spring UMC, along with individuals and groups too numerous to list, for their ongoing support to this ministry, as it celebrates its service to the community.

Anyone who is unemployed, underemployed or unhappily employed is welcome to attend the weekly meetings at Cave Spring UMC on Hazel Drive in Roanoke, Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. □



A Cave Spring UMC’s Back on the Path “helper” assists some of the “hikers” who are seeking assistance in finding jobs.

hear that in the church. God did not create the church for you or for me. God created the church for God’s mission, which is to establish fully God’s Kingdom on this earth. What a great joy and privilege to hear God say to the church, “Let me use you for this great mission I have for the world.”

It is obvious from Julie’s philosophy that God is going to use her and her team to make this world a little better place. Alleluia! □

– Rev. Hilary W. “Pete” Costello Jr., retired local pastor, Warrenton

## November issue informing

I found several articles in the November issue of the *Advocate* to be informing and formational in my thinking about Thanksgiving. I continually find this publication to be helpful in providing insights and resources for application in my life and ministry. I thank you and your staff for what you are doing. □

– Rev. R. Franklin Gillis Jr., retired elder, Richmond

## Veteran Sunday school teacher expresses concern about church

I was so glad you published the letters of the Rev. Alan Murphy and the Rev. Jim Noland in the October *Advocate*. They expressed just how I felt upon reading the September issue.

The leaning toward inclusiveness in our denomination is frightening to me. I taught Sunday school for over 40 years, yet I have never been so concerned about our church. Even Bishop Will Willimon shocked me when he so crudely denigrated Glenn Beck in the Washington [National] Cathedral. I’m not a fan of Glenn Beck, but I do think Bishop Willimon, as a Christian leader, should be more careful with his remarks.

I carefully read each issue of the *Advocate*, for I want to stay in tune with our denomination and where we are headed. □

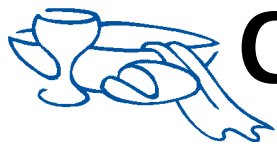
– Joanne Fox, Capron UMC

## Millie Cooper clarifies dates of her conference service

Thank you for printing the photo taken at my 90th birthday celebration (Clergy & Diaconal page, October issue) and for the announcement in the May issue. It was wonderful to see and hear from so many friends.

I would like to correct the dates of my service as given in the photo caption. Briefly, I served in local churches from 1954-1968 and as director of Conference Youth Ministries from 1968 until my retirement in 1984. □

– Millie Cooper, retired diaconal minister, Newport News



# Clergy & Diaconal

## Deaths

**Maxine Lawhorn Blake**, widow of the Rev. Frank W. Blake, died Oct. 8, 2011.

**Peggy Q. Spivey**, widow of the Rev. Charles B. Spivey Jr., died Nov. 8, 2011.

**LaVearn Everett**, widow of the Rev. Roy Everett, died Nov. 12, 2011.

**Thelma Lucille Parsley Crump**, mother of the Rev. G. Wayne Parsley, died Oct. 19, 2011. Wayne is a retired elder living in Parksley in the Eastern Shore District.

**Nathan H. Tanner Jr.**, father of the Rev. David R. Tanner and grandfather of Jonathan Tanner, died Oct. 28, 2011. David is a retired elder living in Roanoke. Jonathan is lay supply pastor of Hallwood UMC in the Eastern Shore District. Jonathan's wife, the Rev. Melody P. Tanner, is a provisional elder serving the Guilford Charge (Guilford and St. Thomas UMCs) in the Eastern Shore District.



## Conference extension ministers gather

*Bishop Charlene Kammerer met recently with clergy serving in extension ministries on behalf of the Virginia Conference. Extension ministers serve in a variety of ministry settings beyond the local church. Several extension ministers shared about their ministries, and Dr. Jan Holton, assistant professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at Yale Divinity School, addressed the group.*

## Rev. Peter Moon receives Lilly grant for three-month sabbatical

The Rev. Peter Moon of Woodlake UMC has been awarded a grant from the National Clergy Renewal Program of the Lilly Foundation in the amount of \$43,000. This is an award given to pastors to fund a time of renewal or sabbatical. The funds are given to the local congregation and will be



**Moon**

disbursed through Woodlake. The gift is to be used to enable travel and to provide a pastor to serve Woodlake for three months in Moon's absence.

The program allows congregations to send their pastors for an extended time of renewal and reflection. They can step back from their busy lives

and gain the fresh perspective and renewed energy that a carefully considered season of travel, study, rest and prayer can provide.

Working with their congregations, the ministers design their renewal periods to suit their own needs and aspirations. The pastors are encouraged to include their families in the renewal activities

The sabbatical is intended to be centered around a theme, and Moon's theme will be that of "story."

"To me, the thing that renews me the most is simply listening to people's stories of faith and renewal," Moon said. "During this time of renewal, I will be circumnavigating the country (by car!), listening to faith stories from folks in mainline denomination churches all around the nation.

"Years ago, Charles Kuralt jour-

neyed across the nation to listen to stories (for CBS News) and I would like to do a similar thing from a faith perspective. I will be traveling to Atlanta, Pensacola, Shreveport, Austin, the Grand Canyon, San Francisco, Seattle, Montana, the Northern Plains, Chicago, Detroit and back home to Virginia. In between, my five children and my wife will be joining me in the Grand Canyon for a time of hiking and 'storytelling.' My wife, Lynn, also will meet me in the Pacific Northwest to reconnect with our story. Finally, Lynn and I will be traveling to England for 10 days to reconnect with our Methodist story."

After his travel, Moon will have several weeks at home to read, write, reflect on his journey and prepare to return to his ministry with Woodlake. He plans to take this sabbatical from August to November of 2012. □

# Learning to develop a spiritual life is a challenge in our daily tasks



**Charlene Payne Kammerer**  
Bishop of the  
Virginia Conference

**T**wenty years ago this fall, I graduated from United Theological Seminary with a Doctor of Ministry degree. Our track was a DS/D.Min. group. All the participants were serving as district superintendents from across the U.S. part of our connection.

My project was “the spiritual life of the district superintendent” (DS). The formal title later became “The Spiritual Life of the District Superintendent – Barometer of Vitality for the Denomination.” We had to get the whole group to discern with us if we were on the right path with our individual projects. One of the D.Min. group members from a different conference was included in the “defense of the dissertation” phase of the work. Also, a DS from your home conference participated in your work in the defense. It was a different model and a most effective one for transformational learning.

Of course, from early on, in my home conference, some people would raise an eyebrow and comment: “The spiritual life of the DS – isn’t that an oxymoron? Why would you pick that topic?!” The answer to that question is the same for anyone serving in ministry, regardless of the setting or the title. None of us can be in ministry, or stay in ministry, without being centered in Christian spiritual disciplines.

Learning how to develop a spiritual life, apart from the task of day-to-day ministry, is a big challenge for most pastors. What it involves is learning how to pray, regular reading of Holy Scripture, learning how to worship when you are not leading in worship, being in a small group, doing hands-on ministry, and taking time to be in retreat and reflection. It is very hard work because there are always other things demanding your time and focus.

Eugene Peterson has described vocation in this way: “a long obedience in the same direction.” Over time, our spiritual practices are what keep us faithful to the God who called us, the God who is out front leading us to places unknown. I have found that a regular visit to the well of God’s grace is absolutely necessary to honor my call. I trust, through God’s grace, that my life and witness are a blessing to others as well.

Does a DS have a spiritual life? Does a pastor have a spiritual life? Does a lay leader have a spiritual life? Does a bishop have a spiritual life? Does a Christian trying to follow the gospel of Jesus Christ have a spiritual life? You and I are the ones who know the answer to that question. God is always leading us right back to truly knowing ourselves through identifying with the One who created us and loves us unconditionally. Thanks be to God!

Grace and Peace,

*Charlene Kammerer*  
Charlene Kammerer

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Rates for advertising and Tributes are available upon request.

### Local Church News

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

### Letters

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

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