

The Virginia United Methodist

December 2012

\$2

# Advocate

BE  
GLAD  
AND  
REJOICE!

*Hear  
Not*





FROM THE EDITOR



Neill Caldwell  
Editor

God's  
promise  
conquers  
fear



I am writing this the day after Election Day and am enjoying the fact that I no longer have to endure those horribly negative television ads. Both sides of the political divide spent billions (a total of \$6 billion nationally; \$2.6 billion in the presidential race alone, according to *The New York Times*) trying to scare us about all the horrible things that would happen if the other side won.

Yes, “fear” sells. Remember Y2K? The newspaper I worked for at the time put in a whole new computer system because their technicians couldn’t promise that the old one would continue working when the clock struck midnight on Jan. 1, 2000. Hundreds of thousands of dollars later, it was a non-event.

This year we’ve endured enough TV documentaries about the Mayan Calendar prediction that the world will end on Dec. 21 to fill a library. Just the other day I received an e-mail advertising a book that I should review that presumably is about the Mayan Calendar controversy. But it also promises information about pending natural disasters that make the Mayan threat look like small potatoes:

*“The first threat comes from a volcano on La Palma, one of the Canary Islands off the coast of Africa, the eruption of which would cause a massive landslide into the Atlantic that would unleash a 3,000-foot-high mega-tsunami. Scientists state such a wave would travel across the Atlantic at the speed of an airliner before decimating the east coast of the United States, leveling New York, Boston and Miami. The second major event described in the book is far more devastating – the long overdue eruption of the Yellowstone Caldera, a super-volcano packing the equivalent of ten thousand Mount Saint Helens. Besides the widespread devastation and destruction, the eruption would blanket the Earth’s atmosphere, cutting off the sun’s rays and leading to a 100,000-year Ice Age.”*

Wow. Remind me not to make any appointments for 2013. Fear dominates our society. It strikes at our core and isolates us when we need to band together. So where do we turn?

Sometimes when researching an Advocate monthly theme I will go to the website Biblegateway.com and punch in some key words into the search engine just to see what the Scripture says. A check for “fear” gets dozens of hits, but so does “fear not” .... Yes, the Bible also is full of fear. Some of that means to be in awe of God’s might. But some is real bone-chilling fear. Yet from Genesis to Revelation, God constantly promises protection.

As we celebrate the coming birth of the Lord, we remember that the Christmas story in Luke and Matthew includes four times – to Zachariah, Mary, Joseph and finally to the shepherds – when the angel spoke the words “fear not! Do not be afraid!”

Even in the most challenging of days we have the Word of God to rely on, to steady us and encourage us when things turn dark. For “nothing can separate us from the love of God.”

*Neill Caldwell*

Connecting with the  
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**Advertising/Tributes**  
Rates for advertising and tributes are available upon request.

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

**Letters**  
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Mission is driven by the Holy Spirit

In the *Advocate* Commentary section (Oct. pg 4), Tom Berlin writes about the “missional DNA” of Floris United Methodist Church. He writes, “A passion for mission is the fruit of spiritual conversion.”

There are organizations outside the church that have this same passion for missions and often they are more successful at it than the church. So what’s the difference in the church doing missions from the secular?

Tom nailed that reason. He writes: “There is no limit to what a group of people can do when they are captured by a vision of what the church, led by the Holy Spirit, can accomplish.”

Here is another way of saying the same thing: There is no limit to what a group of people can do when through prayer they are captured by a vision from the Holy Spirit, and are willing to surrender to “not my will, but yours be done.”

Maybe the difference is that the secular is often driven by ego where the church is driven by the Holy Spirit. What a great difference!

-Hilary “Pete” Costello is retired local pastor in Warrenton.

The home-bound mission field

Recent disabilities have led to our isolation and loneliness in the last year. Once quite active, we found ourselves missing many activities. When discussing our loneliness with the Rev. George Gorman of Shady Grove UMC in South Boston, he told us to write to people who were more lonely than we could imagine. He gave us the name and address of a prisoner residing on Death Row. Wondering what we had to offer someone on Death Row, we took the leap. Much to our surprise, the first letter we received was filled with love, faith and knowledge of just where this gentleman was going to spend eternity. Talk about humbling! Here is just part of his response:

*“I am a spiritual person, but not religious. I do read religious materials to gain a clarified understanding on many things while getting enlightened about things before my time. All in all, I love learning new things. That’s why I read and write so much.*

*“Also, I want you to know that I’m a sincere person at heart who loves being honest. So if you ask me anything, you will receive the trust only, no matter what the question concerns. I believe that in order to be real with others, we must first be real with ourselves first. Do you agree?”*

*“Besides reading and writing in general, I love to*

*compose poetry, quotes and short stories. In a sense I’m hoping that they will help others in some small way. It’s a way for me to make amends with all the pain I’ve caused others in my past! There definitely was a time in my life when I didn’t know how to receive and give love. I had to learn through much trial and error.”*

— William Brailey  
Both our own pastor, the Rev. Marshall Banks of Chatham Heights UMC in Martinsville, and Rev. Gorman have been supportive in this endeavor.

Since that first prison pen-pal in January to the present time, we are writing to 23 prisoners, two mothers of prisoners and six children of prisoners across 10 states. This has proven to be the greatest mission effort we have ever undertaken.

It is our hope that thousands of other Christians will pick up a pen and touch another human being who is also a Child of God.

We would be happy to forward information for caring people to get started in this effort. We can be reached at: Tom and Nancy Farrell, 134 Hanover Drive, Martinsville, VA 24112; email: tnfarrell@yahoo.com; or call (276) 656-6625.

Even two retired people in their 70s can work for the Lord without going out into the mission field. Serving God is just a stamp, stationery and a mailbox away.

-Nancy Farrell, Martinsville



Newborn Sarah and Gabbie

Come, thou unexpected baby

By Stephen A. Rhodes

My wife, Lynn, and I had been waiting in a state alternating between hope and anxiety for nearly nine months. This was her third pregnancy. It had gone well, and on the surface there seemed no cause for concern. But try telling any couple of an expectant child to not worry – it’s inherent in the process of becoming a parent. Our only real cause for concern was the size of the baby. The doctors who had been examining Lynn throughout the pregnancy had told her to expect a large child. Our first two children, Cora and Hannah, had been healthy, weight-wise, weighing in at seven and eight pounds respectively. But this third child, doctors predicted, would weigh somewhere in excess of 10 pounds – a much larger baby this time round.

So it was with expectation and some concern that we made our way to Fairfax Hospital on March 6, 1994. Lynn’s water broke about 3 a.m. and her contractions proceeded quite rapidly. Her labor was not long. The roomed filled with the doctor and several nurses, and at around 5:30 a.m. Sarah Ruth Rasor Rhodes made her way into the world. The doctor who delivered her was a wonderful older man. This was his first delivery since returning from his own medical leave – he had

had open heart surgery, but now was glad to be back where he belonged.

The nurse who held Sarah called out, “7.1 pounds.” I remember thinking that this was odd. She was supposed to be a big baby, but here she was weighing in a relatively normal weight of seven pounds. Well, predicting weight can be a tricky thing, so that must have been a little off. At this point I was holding Lynn’s hand while the nurse worked on Lynn’s stomach. Offhandedly, I asked the nurse, “There’s not another baby hiding in there, is there?” (Lynn would later forgive this insensitive remark out of parental anxiety.) “On no,” the nurse responded somewhat nervously. What I didn’t know at the time was that the nurse had indeed felt something unusual in Lynn’s stomach, and was desperately trying to attract the doctor’s attention, who himself was busy with other matters. Finally the doctor’s and nurse’s eyes met and there was a distinct look of recognition. “By gosh,” he exclaimed, “there IS another baby in there.”

Quickly, the room filled again with nurses, readying themselves for a second delivery. Within about seven minutes, another baby girl entered the world and into our lives. Since we did not

have a second name picked out, she would be called “Baby B” until we could come up with something a little more suitable. I remember how worried Lynn was at this moment, wondering whether she had the strength to deliver another baby. I was partially in shock myself, so I just held her hand and assured her that she could do it. With a couple of pushes, Baby B was successfully delivered. I remember how happy the doctor was at this second, unexpected birth. “This is just like the old days,” he said, “counting them as they come out.” By the way, Baby B weighed in at 6.7 pounds. Between her and her sister, the doctors had been right about the total weight – just not the number of children.

Now we were the parents of two new children, but only one had a name. Making sure that Lynn was well cared for and ready to rest, I went home to tell our two other children that they had two new sisters. While I was at home, I took some time to reflect on all

that had happened and also to see if I could come up with an acceptable name for Baby B.

When I returned to the hospital a little later, I had a name for Lynn to think over. This name was Gabriella Eve. As I explained it to Lynn, Gabriella was the feminine form for Gabriel, the angel who came to another young woman and said, “Behold, surprise! You’re going to have a baby!” Mary was every bit as surprised as we were at that announcement of an unexpectant birth. And I suggested the name of Eve because, like the biblical Eve, our little one had hidden from us just as Eve hid from God. Lynn thought it a good name. And so, the one who initially went unnoticed by doctors and parents became Gabriella Eve Rasor Rhodes.

In this season of Advent as we wait for God’s action in our lives and in this world, may we prepare ourselves for the unexpected, the unplanned – for God to give birth in us the hope that is eternal. 🍷



Gabbie and Sarah now at 18.





# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



## God's work cannot be accomplished from a distance

Doing God's work requires people who understand that our greatest gift to our brothers and sisters in other lands is our willingness to stand with them in the midst of their need.

Verona UMC's mission team to Haiti, Oct 5-12, 2012.



By Bob Weeks

In 24 hours we would be on a plane home to the Virginia mountains after a week of church reconstruction in Leveque, Haiti. But now, standing on a lush, tropical peak, 3,000 feet above the sprawling capital city of Port-au-Prince, our 11 team members tried to capture the panoramic view spread before us: a blue ocean to the west interrupted by the mountainous island of La Gonave; more mountains spreading north and east and south; clouds breaking up the hazy blue sky, the lowest ones rolling up the side of the mountain and gently misting us. Below us was metropolitan Port-au-Prince with its 3.7 million inhabitants.

We were exhausted. I had been going on mission trips to Haiti since 1981, but never had I been on a team that worked so hard. At some point during our

week in Leveque, my body had rebelled, deprived of electrolytes and perspiring at a rate that superseded my ability to take in water. Never had I longed for the luxury of air-conditioning as much as on this trip.

That's why our side-trip to the mountain overlook that afternoon was so appealing. Three thousand feet above Port-au-Prince it would be 10 degrees cooler. At 3,000 feet the air would be clearer, the stench of trash less nauseating, the maddening traffic and crowds a distant reality. I longed to get above and away from it all.

Looking down, we began to talk about how different reality can seem from three thousand feet. We could see houses and office buildings and ribbons of twisting roads. We saw no people. From a distance there was an almost pastoral aura to the urban mass that is Port-au-Prince. It was so still and so quiet, and the scars of earthquakes and hunger and human blight had disappeared.

God sees us from a distance. Isn't that what the Bette Midler song says? The one from the early 1990s that won the Grammy for song of the year:

*"From a distance we all have enough / And no one is in need /*

*And there are no guns, no bombs, and no disease / No hungry mouths to feed / .... God is watching us.*

*God is watching us. God is watching us, from a distance."*

Standing at 3,000 feet above Port-au-Prince I began to hum "From a Distance" and turn its lyrics over and over in my head, until I stopped in my tracks, realizing the song's premise was a prime example of what Stephen Colbert means by the coined word "truthiness" – "the quality of seeming to be true according to one's intuition, opinion or perception without regard to logic, factual evidence or the like." I suddenly understood that no matter how high I climbed, no matter how much I distanced myself from the almost four million inhabitants of Port-au-Prince, the truthiness of that song could never alter the factual reality of Haiti's existence: disease and hunger and injustice remained its citizens' constant companions.

Though a distant, blithely ignorant God may have seemed "truthy" and appealing to many when Bette Midler sang "From a Distance," the factual truth of my faith is that the God who called me to Haiti is not a God who watches from a distance. This is the God of the manger and the cross; the God of the incarnation who weeps over cities and bleeds for our healing; who embraces our humanity and rejoices in our diversity. Like Peter on the occasion of Christ's

transfiguration, I wanted to remain on the mountain. It was pleasant there – a safe place to distance myself from the vulnerabilities and risks of relationships. But like Peter, Jesus sent me back down the mountain and into the painful crush of humanity.

I've heard the arguments against sending mission teams to other countries. Airfare is too expensive. The physical risks are too high. It would be more efficient to simply send a check and offer a prayer of encouragement.

I've heard those arguments but couldn't disagree more. The mission God calls us to cannot and will not be accomplished from a distance. It requires a people who will hold and comfort and work shoulder to shoulder with the victims of natural disasters and wars and injustice. It requires people willing to sweat and ache for the sake of the Gospel; people who understand that our greatest gift to our brothers and sisters in other lands is our willingness to stand with them—even if only for a few days—in the midst of their need.

Climbing back into our van, we descended back into the hellish streets of lower Port-au-Prince. Away from the cooling mists of the distant overlook, back among the people of Haiti, I felt my heart strangely warmed. 🍷

*—The Rev. Bob Weeks is pastor of Verona UMC in the Harrisonburg District.*

# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

## Horton inducted into communicators' Hall of Fame at October conference

The Rev. Al Horton, senior pastor at First United Methodist Church of Charlottesville, was inducted into the United Methodist Association of Communicators' Hall of Fame Oct. 19 for his years of service to the church as Virginia Conference Advocate editor and Director of Communications.

The denomination's communicators concluded their meeting in Arlington Oct. 20 at the Hyatt Regency Crystal City, just a short distance from where Horton first got involved with The United Methodist Church as a Boy Scout at Arlington Temple UMC.

Horton is a past-president of the association and was named Communicator of the Year in 2002. He served on the Virginia Conference staff from 1986-2001 and oversaw the transition to new forms of technology, bringing computers, video and electronic mail into the conference office. He stepped away from the position in 2001 to return to the pastorate and was appointed to Mount Pisgah UMC in Midlothian.

In accepting the honor, Horton said he hoped that bishops of the church and other leaders would better understand the important role that communicators play in helping churches, districts and conferences spread the gospel message of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

Horton graduated from The College of William & Mary and earned an MDiv and ThM at Duke Divinity School. He and his wife, Cheryl, have three adult sons.

The Virginia Conference Communications office also fared well in the organization's annual awards competition. The Virginia United Methodist Advocate received honors in the Print Media/Magazine category, and designer Cathryn Wooton was honored with an Award of Excellence for the magazine's redesign this summer. Wooton was also recognized for her work on the conference's annual "Mission Opportunities" guidebook in the Print Media/Special Publications category, and for her

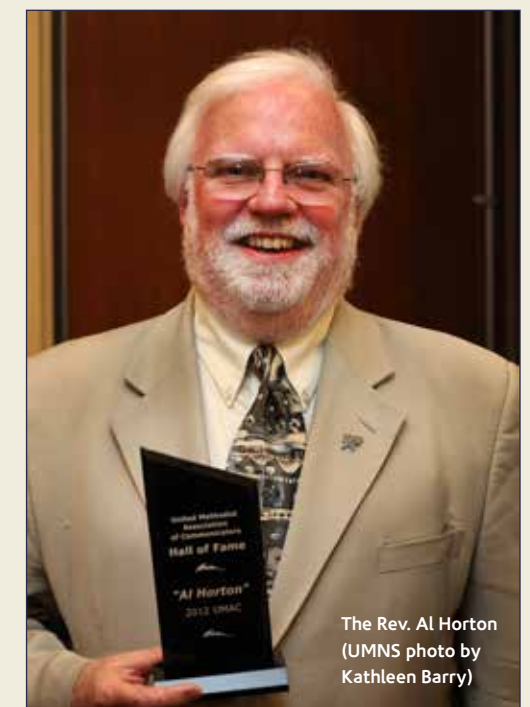
design of Bishop Young Jin Cho's introductory brochure and DVD packet sent to Southeastern Jurisdictional delegates in the Campaign Materials category.

Advocate Editor Neill Caldwell was honored in the Writing/Editorials category.

Pheath Ram and Linda Rhodes were honored in the Video Production classification for their work on the video tribute to Bishop Charlene Kammerer shown during her retirement recognition at 2012 Annual Conference.

Caldwell was one of several United Methodist News Service contributors honored for website content during 2012 General Conference in the Digital Media category.

Kathryn Witte of the Nebraska Conference and Lisa Diehl of the Kansas West Conference were co-winners of the organization's annual Communicator of the Year award for their combined work as those two conferences merge. 🍷



The Rev. Al Horton (UMNS photo by Kathleen Barry)



## The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



### Roanoke church continues exemplary concert series



Empire Brass is just one of the prominent musical groups that has performed as part of the Greene Memorial Fine Arts Series at Greene Memorial UMC in Roanoke.

The Greene Memorial Fine Arts Series was conceived in 1975 by the Rev. Dr. M. Douglas Newman, who was pastor at that time. Since 1979, the series has been under the leadership of Richard Cummins, the church's organist and director of Music & Fine Arts.

This concert series is now in its 37th season, greatly expanded and stronger than ever. Between five and seven concerts take place each season in Greene Memorial UMC in Roanoke. These concerts draw attendees from the congregation, the community and even neighboring states.

Admission is free to all the concerts, though voluntary offerings are received. The exception is the Christmas Dinner/Concert, which also serves as a fundraiser. Further financial support comes from a modest endowment to which contributions are always welcomed. The Greene Memorial Fine Arts Series is a winner of the Perry F. Kendig Award For Outstanding Support of and Excellence in the Arts.

Among the outstanding

singers taking part in these concerts have been Eleanor Steber, Dawn Upshaw and John Cheek, all performers at the Metropolitan Opera. Many celebrated choirs have been heard including a number from the United Kingdom, namely Eton College, Coventry Cathedral, York Minster, and St. Margaret's Church at Westminster Abbey. Closer to home, The American Boychoir, choirs from Westminster Choir College and The Waverly Consort have also appeared. Acclaimed musicians who have given concerts on the Greene Memorial E.M. Skinner organ include the organists of Notre Dame, Paris; St. Paul's Cathedral, London; Westminster Abbey, London; The Mormon Tabernacle, Salt Lake City; The Riverside Church and Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine in New York; and The Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove California. Orchestras and ensembles which have been featured here are True North Brass, Empire Brass and the brass of the Boston Pops as well as The Richmond Sinfonia, The Roanoke Symphony and The North Carolina School of the Arts Chamber Orchestra. The Audubon and Razoumovsky String Quartets have also performed here.

The Greene Memorial Fine Arts is now known around the world thanks to the Internet as well as

word of mouth from artists around the globe who have performed here. Typically over the years, requests have been received from artists who wish to perform at Greene Memorial UMC. These requests have come from South America, the U.S., the U.K., France, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Sweden, New Zealand, Poland, Australia and Russia.

The Greene Memorial Choir has offered the area some of the first performances of older masterpieces as well as new works such as Paul McCartney's *Liverpool Oratorio*, David Briggs' *Requiem*, *The Ballad of Judas Iscariot* by Richard Purvis, *Requiem* of Mack Wilberg and three new major works by contemporary Irish composer, Mary McAuliffe. Older choral works having their first area hearing in this concert series include Debussy's *The Prodigal Son*, Saint-Saens' *Requiem* as well as three Handel oratorios: *Samson*, *Esther* and *Joshua*. All these performances have been a part of the Greene Memorial Fine Arts Series.

Over the years, Cummins has consulted with churches, of various denominations in five states, concerning the formation of church-sponsored concert series. His latest work in this area was with The Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York. 📍



## The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

### Host a dinner party for Stop Hunger Now

Just in time for the holiday season, Stop Hunger Now is offering a "Dinner Party In a Box," a fun way to share the organization's mission with your friends.

The dinner party in a box contains one of Stop Hunger Now's meal bags, which serves six people, and all the essential pieces of hosting a dinner party with five guests. The instructions walk you, step-by-step, through the invitation process, setting your table and preparing your meal, even offering different recipes from some of the countries we serve. The place cards each display a photograph of a child served by Stop Hunger Now meals and their stories of the impact of that food. For the evening, each guest will represent one of those chil-

dren while you discuss the enclosed hunger facts and discussion questions on how you can join Stop Hunger Now in the fight to end hunger in our lifetime.

The last step is to follow up with Stop Hunger Now to let us know how you and your friends have decided to make a difference by being a hunger hero.

You can make a donation and receive a Dinner Party in a Box online at [www.stophungernow.org/dinner](http://www.stophungernow.org/dinner) or by calling 1-888-501-8440.

Contact Karen Sullivan, Annual Giving Manager, at [ksullivan@stophungernow.org](mailto:ksullivan@stophungernow.org) with any questions or to make a donation. 📞

-Chessney Barrick for Stop Hunger Now



## UMFS invites you on a Special Journey to England and Germany May 16-23, 2013

**Discover the history of John Wesley's ministry in England**  
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**Reserve today! This tour is limited to 20 participants. The all-inclusive cost of this tour is \$3,250 and may be tax-deductible.** For additional information, please contact: Development Office, United Methodist Family Services, (804) 254-9450 or [Development@umfs.org](mailto:Development@umfs.org)



# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



## Cokesbury closures create sense of loss

By Heather Hahn

The United Methodist Publishing House board's decision to close its 57 Cokesbury brick-and-mortar stores — including 19 seminary stores — will affect about 285 full-time and part-time employees. The news already has dismayed a number of United Methodist customers.

"There is a sense of loss," said the Rev. Donna Hankins-Hull, associate pastor of children and family at First United Methodist Church in Little Rock, Ark. She said she would miss her visits to the Cokesbury store that shares a building with her church.

Neil Alexander, United Methodist Publishing House president and publisher, described the redirecting of resources as a needed change in an increasingly digital landscape.

"I have the highest admiration for the staff teams at the stores whose dedication and skills amaze and delight so many customers," he said. "Having the stores close and the staff leave is wrenching and deeply disappointing. But as painful as it is, it is also financially and practically necessary."

The Publishing House has launched the initiative CokesburyNext to redirect resources to Cokesbury.com and extend the hours of the Cokesbury Call Center (1-800-672-1989) to 24 hours a day six days a week by early 2013. Until the end of the year, the call center's hours extend to 10 p.m. Eastern Time.

Cokesbury also plans to expand its presence at special church events such as annual conference sessions and vacation Bible school showcases. The retailer expects to deploy more than

A customer shops at the Cokesbury store in Nashville, Tenn. UMNS file photo by Mike DuBose

40 sales representatives to work directly with customers at their churches and other ministry settings.

Alexander acknowledges economic realities make operating the Cokesbury stores no longer financially viable. He said the stores had fixed operating costs in the 2012 fiscal year that were about \$2 million greater than their combined sales.

Online retailers and e-book sales have put increasing pressure on both chain and independent bookstores in recent years — with last year's shuttering of Borders as the most prominent example.

Augsburg Fortress, the publishing ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, recently announced the year-end closing of its last U.S. retail store at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. In the last decade, thousands of Christian bookstores have shut.

Cokesbury customers also are increasingly turning online. A recent customer survey found that only 15 percent of Cokesbury's customers shop exclusively at its stores, according to a Publishing House statement. In

2009 research, and again in 2012, more than 70 percent of customers surveyed indicated that they did not have a Cokesbury store "within driving distance" and that Cokesbury.com was their shopping preference, Alexander said.

Cokesbury stores will close based on local circumstances such as lease expirations. All locations will end business no later than April 30, 2013. Plans for each store are at CokesburyNext.com.

The Publishing House plans to make a concerted effort to help the 185 full-time and 100 part-time staff at its Cokesbury stores to find new work, providing outplacement services and severance packages.

The Publishing House traditionally has devoted any net income from Cokesbury back to the church. Cokesbury profits have helped finance clergy pensions, particularly in the central conferences — the denomination's regions in Africa, Asia and Eurasia. Its revenue also has helped support churchwide initiatives such as Change the World and Imagine No Malaria.

The Publishing House released \$5 million to support the Central Conference Pension Initiative between 2004 and 2008, reports

(Continued on pg. 12, "Cokesbury")



## Easy riders

Heart Havens had about 35 riders for its first Motorcycle Rally on Oct. 27, but the first rain of Hurricane Sandy may have held down participation. Heart Havens provided t-shirts, goodie bags, homemade ice cream, and gave away a GPS system. Residents from the Ashland Home and the Marybeth Graff Home came out to enjoy the day. Pictured: top, Barry and Chris from Marybeth Graff check out a bike; middle, Dawn and Tarshay from the Ashland Home inside the Steel Horse motorcycle shop where the event was held; bottom, the band Righteous Outlaws donate their talents to area non-profits. Heart Havens also dedicated its second home in Lynchburg on Nov. 11. Like the first Lynchburg home, which opened in 2004, Lynchburg 2 was built by volunteers, including Heart Havens residents, staff, neighbors and members of local United Methodist churches. The Rev. Doug Pillow led the fundraising that made both homes possible.

## Your house...



Celebrating 80 years of service

...can become a very special home for retired United Methodist pastors and their spouses in the years to come.

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

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

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

c/o Thomas L. Coffman, President  
4837 Village Lake Dr.,  
Richmond, VA 23234  
Retired Clergy Housing Corp.

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## The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



### VUMPI names new executive director



John W. Fuller, the new executive director of Virginia United Methodist Pensions, Inc.


**J**ohn W. Fuller has been hired as executive director of Virginia United Methodist Pensions, Inc. (VUMPI), effective Nov. 12, according to an announcement by the Rev. Clarence Brown, VUMPI board chair.

Most recently Fuller worked for Mercer in Richmond where he provided health benefits consulting services to a range of clients including employers and membership organizations; assisted clients with development of health benefit strategies; maintained oversight of client benefit program activities to ensure compliance with pertinent laws and regulations; and partnered with

clients to develop pilots for innovative approaches to employee benefit programs in order to reduce the rate of growth in health care costs and improve health care quality. He served as primary consultant overseeing advisory services provided to AARP and is very familiar with Medicare Advantage, Medicare Part D and Medicare Supplement Plans, ancillary health programs and comprehensive medical products.

Fuller lives in Glen Allen and attends Good Shepherd UMC, where he is a member of the praise band. He is a graduate of Virginia Military Institute in Lexington and has his Master of Business

Administration from the University of Richmond.

"The search committee's priority was to find an individual that was strong in health care benefits, hands-on actual experience with health plans and administration of such plans," Brown said. "They also were looking for a person who would be able to evaluate coming trends, be creative with plan options and at the same time control costs. We feel we have selected a unique individual that will lead VUMPI through the upcoming critical years in navigating some difficult health and pension waters." 

### Bragg joins conference IT department

**A**s of Oct. 16, Dwight Bragg assumed the duties of Network Administrator for the Virginia Conference.

Bryan Compton's new job title is the conference Manager of Technology.

"These new job positions have been approved by the Information Technology Resource Team, Common Table Personnel Committee and the Common Table to strengthen the conference's Information Technology department by employing two full-time staff," said the Rev. Marc Brown, director of Connectional Ministries.

Bragg started at the United Methodist Center in late July as a temporary IT worker before being hired full-time.

Bragg and his family live in Chesterfield. He's a graduate of Delaware State University with a degree in Mathematics/Computer Science. Prior to joining the conference staff, Bragg was Systems Administrator at Northrop Grumman Corp. He has also worked as systems administrator for the Education Corporation of America, Apex Systems, Planit Technology and the LandAmerica Financial Group.




(Cokesbury, Continued from pg. 10) the United Methodist Board of Pension and Health Benefits. Of those funds, \$3.3 million went to U.S. annual conferences, which often chose to pass the funds to the Central Conference Pension Initiative. The Publishing House also supplied \$100,000 of the pension initiative's start-up costs.

But the pension board has not received any pension initiative funds from the Publishing House since 2008. Since the financial markets decline in 2008-2009, Alexander said, the Publishing House has not had sufficient net revenue to pay contributions to annual conference claimants. Since the market down-

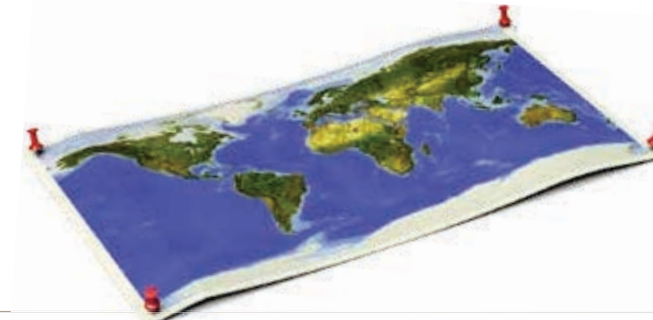
turn, Publishing House's staff pension fund is currently underfunded and its board has adopted a seven-year plan to restore the fund's assets.

Still, many United Methodists have expressed disappointment at the news.

Others said the Cokesbury website was difficult to use. "We want to encourage people who may not have shopped with Cokesbury.com in the past year to take another look," Alexander said. "We are also eager to hear any and all specific concerns because we are committed to make every possible effort to address them quickly." 

-Heather Hahn is a reporter for United Methodist News Service.

## Religious news from around the NATION & WORLD



### Volunteers are the lifeblood of storm response

By Susan Kim

**A**fter Hurricane Sandy ripped through the New Jersey coast, the Manasquan United Methodist Church was left without power, but the Rev. Reggie Albert was determined that her church wouldn't be powerless.

She started with the simple act of opening the doors. "I wasn't sure what I would do, but I knew I wanted to open the church."

The next day, she set up a generator, and four people gathered at the church before dawn to make a "simple breakfast" for a dozen or so people.

It grew into a feast for the masses. "We fed 300 people that morning," she said, "and food just kept coming in."

Was it a miracle? It's the miracle of volunteers who are in the right place at the right time. That's sometimes hard to come by, particularly in the emergency phase of a disaster, when it's too early for trained Early Response Teams to deploy, too early to organize and house out-of-state volunteers, and too early for hurricane survivors to even know exactly what they need.

During this chaotic phase, faith-based response depends on churches that open their doors because the volunteers behind those doors

are reaching out, said Tom Hazelwood, UMCOR's assistant general secretary for U.S. Disaster Response.

"There is never any reason for neighbors not to help neighbors," he said.

At the same time, it's often complicated in the emergency phase to even attempt to match up rapidly-changing needs of disaster survivors with volunteers who are aching to help and become frustrated when they can't, he added.

"Volunteers are the lifeblood of the United Methodist response," he said. "It is key for long-term recovery that you are set up to be able to receive volunteers."

The Greater New Jersey Conference is in the process of setting up a website on which volunteers can register and sign up to travel to New Jersey.

Sending the right message to volunteers is never easy. Sometimes, especially in the first few weeks after a disaster strikes, a spontaneous local response reaches disaster survivors at just the right time.


Meanwhile, out of the chaos, the miracles emerge. At St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Bay Head, volunteers are serving meals for 12 hours a day, seven days a week.

The Rev. Scott Bostwick had no idea his church would be asked by local emergency management

officials to become the meal provider for the town.

As he watches trays of food being carried off of vans into the church, Bostwick said he has relied on volunteers to help his church become the town's relief center.

"Half my congregation can't even get into town," he said. "But these volunteers are helping the whole town of Bay Head. I have no idea who they are, but they're helping."

Your gift to UMCOR U.S. Disaster Response, Hurricanes 2012, Advance #3021787, will help UMCOR to be with storm survivors over the long term of their recovery. 

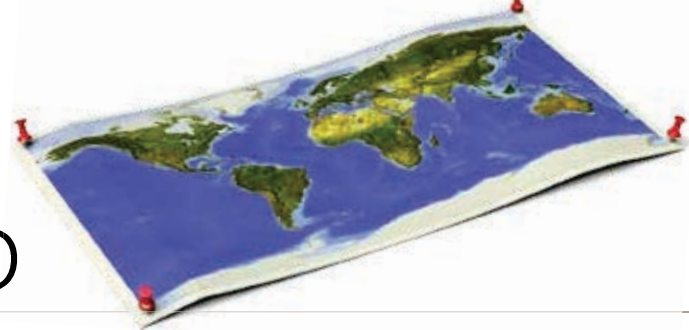
-Susan Kim is a regular contributor for [www.umcor.org](http://www.umcor.org).



St. Paul United Methodist Church in Bay Head, N.J., has been serving meals to hundreds of people every day since Hurricane Sandy hit. Photo by Chris Heckert







## United Methodist court restores security of appointment

By Neill Caldwell

**T**he top court of The United Methodist Church has upheld security of appointment for elders and associate clergy members, striking down legislation passed at General Conference as unconstitutional.

Calendar Item 355 was approved at General Conference in Tampa, Fla., on May 5, 2012. It deleted language of security of appointment and added steps to discontinue elders and associate members from receiving an appointment in Paragraph 337 of the *Book of Discipline*. The change came on a recommendation from the Study of Ministry Commission as a way to replace ineffective pastors.

Judicial Council Decision 1226 says that security of appointment “has long been a part of the tradition of The United Methodist

Church” and said “abolishing security of appointment would destroy our historic plan for itinerant superintendency.” The General Conference action was in violation of the church’s third and fourth Restrictive Rules, which ban changes that would destroy that plan and do away with clergy rights to a trial and appeal, respectively. That right to trial and fair process is “absolute,” the ruling states, and has been upheld repeatedly by previous decisions.

During an oral hearing held Oct. 24 in Elk Grove Village, Ill., Frederick K. Brewington of the New York Conference, the General Conference delegate who asked the Judicial Council to rule on the constitutionality of the legislation, said “Itinerancy is the cornerstone of the whole structure. This action shifts power from the annual conference to the episcopacy. There would no longer be a need to bring charges against an elder, just fail to appoint them. ... Elders make a contract, a covenant, to serve where the bishop sends them. This turns things into a mish-mosh – and that’s not a legal term. It will take away our ability to attract new and young clergy, who will go elsewhere.”

The ruling restores *Book of Discipline* Paragraphs 377, 321 and 354 to their 2008 language.



The Rev. Dr. William Lawrence, president of the Judicial Council, conducts an oral hearing at the October meeting. Photo by Anne Marie Gerhart, Northern Illinois Conference.

The decision tracks the security of appointment language since it was inserted into the *Book of Discipline* in 1956, and cites several previous Judicial Council decisions where security of appointment was upheld. In Decision 380, the council said that “there is no directly stated Constitutional right to an appointment. However, it is implicit in Constitutional provisions...”

The ruling also mentions a conflict in the 2012 *Book of Discipline*, noting that Paragraph 334 retains similar language that was deleted in Paragraph 337.

The Judicial Council also acknowledged in its ruling that the phrase “guaranteed appointment,” while not used in the *Book of Discipline*, has become common usage around the denomination for the idea of security of appointment.

At the oral hearing, recently retired Bishop Al

Gwinn represented the Council of Bishops and argued to preserve the legislation. “Episcopal duties not changed in any way,” Gwinn told the nine Judicial Council members. “A bishop recommends a person for transitional leave to the Board of Ordained Ministry; the Board of Ordained Ministry must recommend that leave to the clergy session, which has the final decision. Where does the bishop gain additional authority beyond what already exists?”

In a separate case, the Judicial Council also declared unconstitutional Calendar item 20, adopted as amended by the 2012 General Conference, which addresses Discipline Paragraph 602, dealing with the balance between clergy and lay members at annual conference. The General Conference added the language “Clergy who voluntarily indicate that they are unable to attend annual conference because of incapacity or advanced age shall not be counted in arriving at the balance between lay and clergy.” In Decision 1212, the Judicial Council said that “members cannot be eliminated from the count for equalization,” citing Paragraph 32, and added that “the principle of equalization stands and cannot be subverted under the Constitution.”

—Neill Caldwell is editor of the Virginia United Methodist Advocate.

## Streamlined Commission on Religion and Race charts new future

By Heather Hahn

**T**he new, streamlined board of the United Methodist Commission on Religion and Race is embracing a mission that goes beyond monitoring the denomination’s handling of racial matters.

The agency “is in the business of building bridges of hope by equipping the Church at all levels to reach more people, more young people and more diverse people,” the board said in a statement to the denomination.

Among other actions, the board has empowered its top executive, Erin Hawkins, and president, Bishop Minerva Carcaño, to begin conversations with leaders of the United Methodist Commission on the Status and Role of Women about aligning the work of the two agencies in preparation for General Conference, the denomination’s top lawmaking assembly, in 2016.

This conversation follows the vote at the 2012 General Conference for a restructuring plan that would have combined the churchwide commissions into a United Methodist Committee of Inclusiveness. On the last day of General Conference, the Judicial Council – the denomination’s top court – struck down the restructuring plan as unconstitutional. The lawmaking assembly scrambled to pass legislation submitted by agencies, including the Commission on Religion and Race, to reduce the size of their boards.

As conversations begin between the commissions, the Commission on Religion and Race will be looking at ways to help equip annual conferences, seminaries and local churches to become more diverse and more vital.

“The actions taken at this board meeting are small but significant steps to ensure that the ministry of (the commission) effectively supports the church in becoming a relevant and credible witness to the power of Christ in a diverse world,” Hawkins said in a statement.

—Hahn is a reporter for United Methodist News Service.



Erin Hawkins, top executive of the United Methodist Commission on Religion and Race, speaks to the United Methodist Association of Communicators Oct. 17 in Washington. UMNS photo by Kathleen Barry.





“Fear not! Do not be afraid!” is a recurring message in the Bible, one that we must remember in a time when fear is commonly used to motivate human beings.



The Tiffany windows in Arlington Street Church in Boston, MA, are famous for their beauty of design and execution and are believed to be the largest collection of Tiffany windows in any one church. "Message of the Angels to the Shepherds" was designed by Frederick Wilson.

*And lo,*  
THE ANGEL OF THE LORD  
CAME UPON THEM, AND  
THE GLORY OF THE LORD  
SHONE ROUND ABOUT  
THEM, AND THEY WERE  
SORE AFRAID. AND THE  
ANGEL SAID UNTO THEM,  
*Fear not,*  
FOR BEHOLD, I BRING  
YOU GOOD TIDINGS  
OF GREAT JOY, WHICH  
SHALL BE TO ALL PEOPLE.  
FOR UNTO YOU IS BORN  
THIS DAY IN THE CITY OF  
DAVID A SAVIOR, WHO IS  
*Christ the Lord.*

LUKE 2: 9-11



*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Philippians 4:6-7

## 'The Light' casts out fear

By Beth Anderson

My daughter's preschool teacher recently asked me, "What do you say when people ask you about the Mayan calendar and the end of the world being this year? My first thought was a funny one, remembering a Far Side cartoon of the Mayans saying, "We've run out of room" as they had gotten to 2012.

I do not mean this to belittle fears, but to widen our perspective a bit.

My second thought is more serious.

I remember Jesus saying, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only."

Fear is used to manipulate and to threaten. Fear can be a motivating technique, but I do not always find it to be the best. Because you have to stay afraid in order to stay motivated.

As I write, we've had Halloween and we are completing election season. Two seasons focused on fear. My husband enjoys reading Stephen King, but I am not one for horror movies or scary books. Perhaps, I just don't trust it. I feel somewhat skeptical. I want to know the reason why someone wants me to be frightened. So many of our political ads make it sound like the Mayan Calendar may be right. If you do not vote this way, life as we know it... will end!

I was 12 when I attended a haunted house with friends that seemed like your normal run of the mill haunted house, when all of a sudden we were rushed into a room where a man was dressed as the grim reaper walking around a coffin. "Where will you go when you die?" He whispered eerily. "You're all going to hell! Are you afraid?" he screamed, "Unless you confess Jesus as your savior." He then insisted that we must pray a particular prayer so that "we would know Jesus and escape hell."

I have often wondered how many heard about Jesus for the first time there.

As we approach Advent, I think about how others heard about Jesus for the first time.

"Do not be afraid."

These are the words spoken by angels to Mary, to Joseph, and to Shepherds in the fields when they first hear the news of Jesus.

The first thing they are told is to not be afraid.

Christ coming into the world is ushered in with a procla-

mation to not fear.

It's been said that references to not being afraid can be found 365 times in the Bible – enough for every day of the year. Depending on translation you will find that there are numerous times God's word says do not fear, fear not, do not worry, do not be afraid.

When everything in the world seeks to make us afraid, using bullying to persuade, using force to divide, bringing darkness to blind, Jesus comes revealing good news with great joy, ushering unity and inclusion, and shining a light that outshines the dark.

Yes, there is much we could be afraid of.

We must hear the news of the heralding angels every day we battle fear.

I hear people navigate the fears of life, I pray and seek courage with them...How will we make the bills this month? What will the doctor say? When will my son come home from war? When will the pain of depression ease? Where is God in it all?

Our fears are real. But they have nothing of Christ. I cling to God's word.

The Bible doesn't dismiss, mock, or manipulate our fears.

God's word acknowledges that darkness and fear are real. There is darkness, but the "light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." There are dark valleys, but we will walk through them.

The Lord is our "light and my salvation, whom shall [we] fear."

Christ is bigger, brighter, and stronger.

I cling to the words we spoke at our baptism and confirmation and continue to remember at every baptism. We renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of our sin. We accept the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice and oppression in

whatever forms they present themselves. We confess Jesus Christ as our Savior, put our whole trust in his grace and we promise to serve him as our Lord.

Jesus is the Lord of our life – not the fears that would seek to rule us.

When confronted with the powers of the world which seek to invoke fear, Jesus invokes His name, His presence, and His power. Jesus names evil, fear, darkness and conquers it. And in Christ, we are more than conquerors. Christ has come, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

The light shines. Fear not! ☞

-The Rev. Beth Anderson serves Bermuda Hundred UMC.

## God defeats fear

By Emily Moore

For three days in October, I fell asleep late at night on top of the covers, wearing regular clothes, ready to run.

When I had arrived home from a mission trip just a few days prior, my front door was unlocked and ajar. Someone had broken into my neighbors' home a month before; several of their belongings were stolen. We had recently seen strangers in the neighborhood, and my neighbors and I were on alert.

I was afraid to enter my own home, slowly investigating each inch, stepping lightly from room to room. I called the police. I checked each door and window. Nothing appeared to be missing or awry. What an odd feeling to think that others were in my home. Were they planning to return? Over time, I have begun to relax again. I sleep under the blankets now, but I do so with one bionic-like ear listening as a mother does for any aberrant sound.

I learned to live and breathe beside fear when I was young; fear forces you to find new ways to navigate a world you no longer trust in the same way you did before. My mother was killed in a family automobile accident when I was an adolescent; my sister and I somehow survived. For years, when my father was late coming home from work, I was certain he had been killed as well. When I heard the familiar sound of his car on the gravel, I would run to the bathroom, wash off the tears, and greet him at the door as if I had not been afraid.

It was difficult to sleep some nights, wishing for a world in which I no longer lived. I remember God helping me realize that there would be days when all the people with whom I started the day would still be alive at the end of it.

I remember another image of fear, this one from the BBC's coverage of the 2004 Southeast Asia tsunami, of a very thin man lying down, knees bent, arms motionless. He was healthy, except that he had been breathing rapidly and shallowly since he had been found, living in a heightened state of anxiety for many days. I wondered what he saw when he closed his eyes, what he heard when it was silent. It was an image of continuous fear and vulnerability. I wondered what he needed. Someone to sit beside him? Someone to come predictably at the same time every day to sit, and perhaps not even speak? Someone to be a tangible representative

of the steadfast God who loves him? Maybe the frightened man would allow God to help him imagine days when the sun shines and the ocean does not roar uncontrollably, days when the people around him are still alive at the end of it. I wanted to follow Christ into that room where I knew He was already present.

We live in a somewhat fearful society; the vicissitudinous world economy, terrorism and the realities of systemic injustice are prominent in the news. How do we navigate life with what can be immobilizing fear?

I am uncertain how to answer the question, but I know how my adolescent bedfellow of fear got smaller. God helped me realize that no matter what I lost or found untenable at the end of a day, I could count on two unchanging truths: God loved me, and I was never alone. And somehow that has been enough.

The Spirit led my fingers to Psalm 46 after the accident, and I dropped an anchor there. I would sit and read the chapter repeatedly until the words were part of my breathing in, and lens on, the world. I remember wishing I could read Braille so that the letters could touch my fingertips and imprint my skin.

These words of this steady God were for me what Howard Thurman calls his "steadying thread" in the diaphanous strands of our living. The steadfast and sure God I did not understand, but whose presence I felt, was with me before, during, and after those paralyzing moments. As a teenager, I was able to lie down at night beside my fear and grow accustomed to its presence in the room, eventually noticing the God who sat beside me growing far larger than the unwelcome bedfellow.

Jesus calls us to enter those gray and scary spaces where others find themselves, for Jesus is already there, moving and healing in the fearful stuff of life. Je-

sus calls us to the homeless, the abused, the sick, the imprisoned, the children who lie afraid at night. Jesus calls us to be that corporeal reminder of steadfast presence and love in the midst of fearful circumstances that may never make sense. We are to enter with the belief and hope that this steady and sure God takes what is broken and makes it whole, and takes what is dead and brings new life.

When the door is ajar, vehicles turn upside down, the economy rides a roller coaster and disasters strike, God walks beside us in our fear that we might not be overcome by it. It is this companioning God who loves us and never leaves us alone and helps us fall asleep at night. ☞

-The Rev. Emily Moore is associate pastor at River Road UMC, Richmond District

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

2 TIMOTHY 1:7

*I am the Lord your God. I am holding your hand, so don't be afraid. I am here to help you.*

ISAIAH 41:13



*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.* PSALM 46:1-3

## Lord, you never let go of me

By Cathryn Wooton

**I**t was ironic that on the weekend the U.S. declared war on Iraq (March 2003), I was finding peace at Blackstone on the 69th “Walk to Emmaus.”

I arrived for this three-day retreat with friends’ proclamations of “It will change your life!” ringing in my ears. Frankly, I was pretty happy with my life as it was – an idyllic childhood, happily married with two lovely children (one girl, one boy), healthy and active parents, a rewarding career, a church I loved in which I was very active – what could make it any better?

I spent the first day listening to my tablemates’ stories and struggles, thinking happily, “I’m the luckiest one in the room.” The thoughtful presentations held no real revelation for me – I was already well-versed and well-loved. The table projects were fun, and the snacks kept coming. I slept well that night.

But as I slept, God was at work, retooling His plan for day two. Same table, same women, same histories... but like a clever producer who wants to warn the viewer of upcoming drama, God slowly morphed the background music from “Everything’s Coming up Roses” to something more like music from the end of “Titanic.” It became increasingly clear to me that every woman’s life experience included at least one thing that I deeply dreaded... cancer, aging parents, divorce, rebellious teens, the loss of a child, depression, addiction and more. The music in my head got louder, and the stories felt darker. My happy-go-lucky demeanor dissolved into despair. I could not speak when my turn came around because tears were streaming down my face for the rest of the day. I was, all of the sudden, terrified of an inevitable future. I was shaken...maybe for the first time in my entire charmed life.

That evening, we had the opportunity to meet with one of several pastors on the retreat. After I tearfully blurted out my irrational fear of not being prepared for the rest of my life, the pastor spoke in a gentle paragraph of which I only heard one sentence: “Always remember... fear and faith cannot occupy the same space in your heart.”

I had no doubt heard that concept a dozen or more times through Bible studies or church scripture readings – I have since heard it a hundred times. But at that moment, God mainlined it into my heart and added a chaser of total peace.

Day three dawned to a different soundtrack... more like a crescendo of “Look what the Lord has done!” Again, it was the same women with the same stories... but what did I notice in my restored sunlight? JOY! I saw joy that was a result of their faithful journeys and emergence from their valleys of darkness. They were intact, and they lived to tell the stories of God’s love for them! I left the retreat with an assurance that my present life had not changed, but my future had. I tucked that knowledge away, still hoping not to have to unpack it for a while.



That lasted about six months. Two nights before Halloween, my 7-year-old son padded into our room and whispered, “Mommy, I think I’m a little sick. Can I sleep with you?” As I tucked him in between us, I felt a whisper from the Holy Spirit, which I only recognized an hour later when we woke up to the terrifying sound of our son having a seizure. I was strangely “prepared” – or at least not surprised. That one was over quickly, but when the same thing happened the next night, it lasted too long, and we called an ambulance. His father rode with him while I followed behind in my car. The CD was cued up and blaring Steve Bell’s song, “Isaiah 40”... and I made that my prayer as I kept only one

car length between the bumper of the ambulance and the nose of my van.

In the emergency room, Jansen was groggily emerging from the seizure; I held his warm little hand and noticed that his blue eyes were even bluer with the tiny pupils. I leaned close to hear him whisper, “Mom, I don’t want this to be happening to me.” He pulled me back again and finished, “But I’m not afraid.”

Time to unpack, I realized... “I am not afraid either, Jansen.”

When we heard the resident talking on the phone to our doctor saying, “I have one of your patients here with a small brain tumor,” I was not afraid. When they transferred him immediately to MCV, and I got lost trying to follow the ambulance into the parking garage, I was not afraid. When the surgeon visited us in ICU and said he thought it was operable, but he wanted to see how it would react to medicine, I was not afraid. When a bevy of friends and family members visited and milled around his room with tears in their eyes saying, “How are you doing with this?” I was not afraid.

There was ONE thing Jansen was afraid of, however, and that was missing Halloween! To a 7-year-old boy with the most awesome Anakin Skywalker costume, missing Halloween was unacceptable. The steroid shots had made him restless and inconsolable. “Mom, can we call the president and ask him to postpone it?” “Mom, can you bust me outta here?” “Mom, how many more hours until it’s dark?”

The news was bad in that they could not get him in for the MRI until the next day, and Jansen was going to have to settle for the Halloween party down the hall put on by VCU students. He cried and cried, nearly hysterical at the thought of missing the neighborhood parade and evening with his best friend. I suggested that we pray. “Good idea!” he said. “God is bigger than the president anyway.” I prayed for God to calm us both down, but his prayer must have been more direct, because about 30 minutes later, they unexpectedly came in to take him for the MRI, and two hours later, we drove into our neighborhood just in time to catch the line-up for the costume parade!

God granting a little boy his Halloween wish was only the first example of His love for us over the next year as we tried medicine after medicine to suppress or eliminate the increasingly frequent seizures. There was a soccer coach whose son had been operated on by the same surgeon we would end up having. There was the lady in the Records department at the hospital who said one day, “Honey, I have a feeling he’s gonna be fine,” and I believed her. There was a nurse in the aisle seat when we sent both kids by themselves on a plane all the way to New Mexico to visit their grandparents. There were new friends who came out of the woodwork with meals, successful stories, reassurance and gifts. Even Jansen’s teacher had a husband with epilepsy, so

she was not unnerved by his daily seizures in class.

People would say to me, “I don’t know how you are handling this so well.” My response was, “WE are NOT. GOD is.” I likened it to God swooping underneath us with a red velvet carpet that kept us hovering a few inches above the rockiness of real life. God was my constant companion. When I prayed over Jansen every morning before I put him on the school bus, God was the one handing him his backpack, and saying, “Mom, I got this.” I had actually never been so UN-afraid as I was the year my son had a brain tumor.

Our story has a happy ending, as I knew it would. When no medicine did the trick after a year, the doctors decided to go ahead and do a resection and remove the jellybean-sized cyst, which actually left a gobstopper-sized hole in his left frontal lobe. Although they were certain that he would not experience any deficiencies in cognitive, speech or motor skills after the surgery, they predicted that he might have trouble with organization and behavior. We joked, “With an 8-year-old boy, how would we KNOW?”

He’s 16 now, and I still smile when I go into his room at night and see his clothes for the next day laid out neatly on the floor as if they are waiting for him to step into them. Or when he pulls out his busy calendar to give me his marching band and work schedules. Or when his sense of humor confirms our suspicion that the surgeon inserted a “giggle chip” before he closed up.

Other things on that original ominous list have happened on my journey through life... divorce, depression and the loss of my father-in-law. But I carry God’s promise from Psalm 23 in my suitcase:

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
Your perfect love is casting out fear.  
And even when I’m caught in the middle of the storms of this life,  
I won’t turn back, I know you are near.*

*And I will fear no evil,  
For my God is with me  
And if my God is with me,  
Whom then shall I fear?*

*Oh no, You never let go,  
Through the calm and through the storm.  
Lord, You never let go of me. ♡*

Lyrics: “You Never Let Go” by Matt Redman

-Cathryn Wooton is Graphic Designer for the Advocate and a member of the praise band at Shady Grove UMC (Short Pump) in Richmond.



(Top to bottom): Jansen before his brain surgery at the age of 8; getting pre-op kisses from Grandma and Mom; and on a cruise with Mom at the age of 16.



# LOCAL CHURCH NEWS



▲ Youth at **New Hope UMC**, Harrisonburg District, planted 100 pounds of seed potatoes in the spring and this fall have harvested the crop, which yielded 1,296 pounds of potatoes for the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank.



▲ **The Brandermill Church** in Midlothian addressed the question of “who is my neighbor?” by organizing a Fall Festival. With guidance from Wendy McCaig, founder of Embrace Richmond, the church began a dialogue with residents of an inner-city community where a number of members had been volunteering. The group sought to strengthen connections based on the concerns that all families share by discussing the similar struggles, hopes and dreams of families, whether in suburbia or the inner city. Tammy Tipton-Nay, director of Children’s and Family Ministries, coordinated with the Brandermill Community Association to bring together the entire Brandermill community. The celebration featured live music, games, food,

the packaging of 10,000 meals for Stop Hunger Now and much Christian fellowship. Pictured: Brandermill member Jennifer Booker with Laila Gullatte from the Hillside community.

**Calvary UMC**, part of the Richmond Charge in the Fredericksburg District, reached out to its community by offering free school supplies and a free lunch to area families. More than 50 kits and lunches were passed out. The program was a goal of Calvary’s Vital Congregations plan. The church also participated in the annual Warsaw Fest, with a booth where they passed out balloons, lanyards, pens and water. Calvary’s mission partner, Susan Eastwood (serving in Kenya) was able to be there as well, and was able to sell goods made by people in her mission area. Meanwhile another church on the charge, Oakland UMC, has been hosting a series of special services on fifth Sundays throughout the year. In July, the Church held a Youth Sunday. In September, there was a handbell choir featuring a group from Kilmarnock.

Members at **Persons UMC**, Drevyville, marked the 174th birthday of the historic church in September with their annual reunion. Dr. Allen Taylor and family from Greenville, N.C., came with photos from the 1860s. Soldiers from Pickett’s Division in the Civil War are buried in the church cemetery.



▼ Members at **Gum Spring UMC**, Richmond District, were excited to see a steeple and cross installed on their new building. A consecration service is scheduled for Feb. 24.



▼ Members at **Mount Olive UMC**, Toms Brook, Harrisonburg District, prepared 112 school kits for 2013 Annual Conference. By preparing the kits in the fall, the team saved more than \$350 by purchasing the contents while school supplies were on sale. Pictured: Frances Orndorff assembles school bags in her living room at home.



▲ At **Capron UMC**, James River District, members discovered a quilt top that had been created in 1927. One square read “Present preacher and family – Jan. 5, 1927 – Rev. A.K. Lambdin” and listed his family members. The coverlet has been restored and quilted and is now hanging in the fellowship area of the church. Pictured: Helen Gillette (left), church historian; Ann Bain, Worship chair.



▲ In August, 24 helpers – ranging in age from 3 to 83 – harvested potatoes from the **Sunset Drive UMC** church garden in Broadway. The church harvest yielded 84 bushel of potatoes and several bushels of green beans, which were donated to the local food banks.



# EVENTS

## DECEMBER

### Winter Camp

**Dec. 7-9: Camp Westview on the James**  
For 7-15-year olds. Join Westview counselors for a weekend of cold-weather fun. With a variety of camp activities, both camp favorites as well as winter-themed activities, this weekend gives campers a getaway and gives parents the chance to catch up on holiday chores. We will play, celebrate and worship with a focus on the Advent season and what it means to wait for Jesus’ birth. Visit [www.westviewonthejames.org](http://www.westviewonthejames.org) for more information or to register, or call (804) 457-4210.

### Be the Gift!

**Dec. 26-Jan. 5: Nassau, Bahamas**  
The Virginia Conference Council on Young Adults is offering a mission trip to Nassau, where the group will serve two different orphanages and an AIDS Camp. The event is open to all young adults across the conference. For more information, contact Rev. Jessie Squires at [pastorjessiesquires@gmail.com](mailto:pastorjessiesquires@gmail.com).

## JANUARY

### Ministers’ Convocation

**Jan. 15-17: Blackstone Conference Center**  
The theme for 2013 Ministers’ Convocation is “Finding Hope... Bearing Hope.” The keynote speaker will be author Phyllis Tickle. The preacher for convocation will be the Rev. Carl Arrington. Bishop Young Jin Cho will preach at the opening service of Communion. There will be workshops including “Pastoral Care in Changing Times” by the Rev. Judy Hall and “Bringing Hope in the Midst of Crisis” by the Rev. David Canada. Continuing education units will be offered.

### School for Children’s Ministry

**Jan. 12 at Williamsburg UMC**  
**Feb. 9 at Springfield UMC**  
**March 9 at Baylake UMC, Virginia Beach**  
**April 13 at Bonsack UMC, Roanoke**  
The School for Children’s Ministry will hit the road this year and come to a district near you. The schedule is 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at each site. A \$10 registration fee includes lunch, workshops and networking.

### PAUMCS Virginia Chapter

**Jan. 23: United Methodist Center, Glen Allen**  
The PAUMCS Virginia Chapter’s Experience Your Connection Fall 2012 event has been rescheduled for Wednesday, Jan. 23. A brochure and registration information can be found at [www.vaumc.org/paumcs](http://www.vaumc.org/paumcs).

## FEBRUARY

### United Methodist Day at the General Assembly

**Feb. 7: The State Capitol, Richmond**  
The annual opportunity for United Methodist laity and clergy to meet with their senators and delegates in the legislature will happen on Feb. 7. Look in the January *Advocate* for additional details.

### Clergy Spouses’ Retreat

**Feb. 28-March 2: Blackstone Conference Center**  
The theme will be on spiritual development. Leaders will include David Canada, Joy Crawford and Dawn Peck.



# Religious news from around the NATION & WORLD



## Pinterest-ing churches

Finding uses for another popular social media site

By Tita Parham

The number of U.S. adults using social networking sites has nearly doubled since 2008, according to the Pew Research Center.

Of those surveyed in late 2010 through the center's Internet and American Life Project, 79 percent said they use the Internet and nearly half said they use at least one social networking site.

Many United Methodist churches are paying attention to that trend and using social media sites like Twitter and Facebook to reach new people. Now, some are adding Pinterest to the list.

"The whole cliché, 'A picture is worth a thousand words,' ... that's how Pinterest is functioning," said the Rev. Janet Grissett, pastor at Melrose UMC in

Lottsburg, Va.

Melrose — which averages about 92 in worship and is located in a small, rural community — began using Pinterest as another tool to "spread the word about not only our church, but about what The United Methodist Church is doing," Grissett said.

"Right now, we're looking for mostly quotes or (images of) other United Methodist events or churches or charity organizations associated with The United Methodist Church — also the ministries we're doing as a church," she said. "We just look for images that might move somebody. ... And we put it up there."

### How Pinterest works

"Putting it up there" means setting up a free account at [www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com) and then pinning photos or images to virtual bulletin boards. Users pin their own images or ones taken

from other sites, crediting the source, and create as many pinboards as they like. Each has a particular topic. Brief captions or explanations can include a link for more information. A main page lists all the boards created by a user and links to a user's website, Facebook page and Twitter feed.

Grissett's church has 13 boards. Topics include worship, thoughts on church and the Bible.

The goal is to have people follow the boards and re-pin images from them onto other sites, such as Facebook.

If followers "see something that moves them in a powerful way or a particular way, they can click on it and find out more," Grissett said.

### Different from Facebook, Twitter

The Melrose church has Facebook and Twitter accounts, but Grissett says Pinterest's focus is different. "When you go to our board, you don't see words, you see images," she said. "We are looking for images that can draw someone's attention and perhaps

speak to them in a way a Facebook status or Twitter status can't."

Jason McCranie, director of Internet technology at Dunwoody United Methodist Church, near Atlanta, notes other differences.

"Twitter is a very fast moving and this-is-what's-on-our-mind kind of thing. Pinterest is very visual. What you put out there kind of stays out there for a while," he said. "It's a lot like Facebook, but it's not as social, not a lot of one-on-one communication."

Dunwoody is using Pinterest to highlight its mission projects. It now has boards focusing on Scripture and its work with Habitat for Humanity. More boards will be added as mission events are completed.

The 4,000-member church already had Facebook and Twitter accounts, McCranie said. Staff members began using Pinterest several months ago because they noticed Facebook users using their accounts in tandem with Pinterest.

So far, he says, followers of his church's boards are other churches. "We're all trying to kind of feel each other out — what other churches are doing — to see if this is going to be effective for us."

Grissett is enthusiastic about Pinterest and social media.

"It just amazes me when I hear that large companies are hiring people to simply manage their social media networks," she said. "All these social networks are ministry tools. And anything that I can use to reach someone who might not be reached through conventional means, I'm all for it."

-Tita Parham is a freelance writer.

**TO LEARN MORE:**  
See the boards of United Methodist churches using Pinterest. Visit <http://pinterest.com/search/people/?q=umc> and click on the boards of specific churches.

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Devotions from International Lesson Series

# LIVING THE WORD



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**  
*Dr. Lisa Rochford, PhD, is a child psychologist, the mother of two boys and a pastor's wife whose husband can always make her laugh. She and Dave Rochford met while at Davidson College. Lisa went on to UNC Greensboro, commuting from Virginia with Dave on the Brosville charge. Currently they are at St. Mark's in Daleville, where Lisa facilitates a women's Sunday School class.*

**December 2, 2012**  
**Birthright of the adopted**  
**Ephesians 1:3-14**

“I can’t seem to convince her that she doesn’t have to be in charge anymore. She’s always bossing her little sister around, trying to be the parent. She doesn’t get it, that it’s OK to just be a kid. She doesn’t understand that I’m going to be here, to love her and take care of her.”

The foster mother told a story I’ve heard far too often, about a child from an abusive and neglectful home, whose birth parents were not watching out for her in her early years – making her meals and getting her to school on time.

Now this anxious, hyper-vigilant little person is looking out at the world from big, brown, mistrusting eyes. It’s a struggle for her to make sense of a place where someone does care, is in control, will meet her needs, and believes that she’s pretty special.

Are you an anxious child of God? Are you forever trying to control the colliding variables of your life, full of worry about what may come? Are you trying to be the parent in your relationship with your Creator?

Today’s lesson from Ephesians reminds us that we, too, are a rescued people. The adoption papers have been signed by our Lord Jesus Christ and, if we hold fast to faith, we have found our “forever home.”

Think of what that means: no matter where we come from – a home that was warm and inviting, or one with windows broken into a thousand painful shards, we are God’s now. We don’t have to feel like that foster child who bosses everybody around, but can calm our nervous energy and relax. God’s got this.

Ephesians tells us that we were “destined” for this family, that God wants to “lavish” this grace on us (vv. 5-8, NRSV.) And so we learn that with the redemption of Christ, it doesn’t matter if we think we’re good enough or not, we’re still adoptable.

Most of the foster children I have known struggle with self-doubt. Because of the mistreatment they suffered, they automatically see themselves as “bad.” If someone compliments them, it doesn’t feel right. The praise doesn’t match up with how they feel inside.

But we know that God sees the good in us always. God knows the person we can become,

not just who we have been or who we are right now. Whatever we’ve done, we can claim our birthright as God’s forgiven children.

And so our adoption brings us humility, as we struggle to believe that someone would care about us that much, to save us from our fears and our own worst selves.

Our adoption brings us thankfulness! Every day we open our eyes to blessings we could not have found on our own.

Our adoption brings us opportunity, to fulfill the potential God sees in us.

This is where it gets good for the foster child. As she begins to trust her foster parents and relax in the safety of her new home, she can let herself be a kid again. She can start having fun and learning at school. She can believe that she’s pretty cool after all.

It’s also where it gets good for us, the children of God. As we trust our Maker, we let go of worries that we won’t have enough or be enough. We open ourselves to loving others and accomplishing what God created us to do.

**December 9, 2012**  
**Building a temple with them?**  
**Ephesians 2:11-22**

In this passage from Ephesians, we find a vision for peace on earth. The sacrifice of Christ on the Cross made it possible to create “one new humanity in place of the two,” dissolving the hostility between us (vv. 15-16, NRSV.)

The writer of Ephesians was talking about the Jews and Gentiles of his day, but the ramifications are far reaching. Think of anyone with whom you may have viscerally deep differences.

The family member who has hurt you. The “other” political party (not yours). The violent father who harms his wife and children. Pedophiles. Child sex-traffickers.

Our world is rife with evil, and we can find plenty of hate to go around for such as these. We see that we are a broken people, for this is the humanity to which we belong.

You have to wonder what in the human make-up allows for such dichotomies, with the same person who commits atrocious acts in one setting showing love in another. Our spiritual DNA includes many twists and turns that allow us to climb to great heights of human kindness, or fall into deepest pits of depraved indifference.

Ephesians reminds us that there is One who can flatten this frightening helix and pull out the strands of our destruction: this Christ child, born in Bethlehem, who grew to walk among us, and died for us.

I’m not sure I can see it, when I look out at our world and take in all that’s wrong. Division everywhere pulls us asunder. Our country, into bickering hues of red and blue. The Holy Land, into warring Israelis and Palestinians. Our families, into fractious husbands, wives, sisters, brothers.

But we can come together, and someday will, because it is God’s plan. Our Creator is joining the fragmented pieces of our humanity, creating from it the very temple of the Lord (v. 21.) Maybe not tomorrow, but someday, this temple will open its doors, because God is building it, stone by stone, as each of us find our way to faith.

What are you doing today to help build this holy place? How can you bring unity into your corner of the world?

Some of us will do big things, like expose the horrors of human trafficking. Some of us will do small things, like stop brothers from fighting over the cereal in the morning. Some of the small things will seem big, like answering a harsh word with humility and understanding.

We have to remember that we were all created by the same God, marked indelibly with a desire to know this peace. When division arises, we have to stop and look for ways that we really are alike. What values do we share in common? What goals are the same?

If we’re in relationship, we can recall the good times that we have had, the times that we have worked together, and dwell on these good things.

So reach out with small acts of potentially unrequited kindness. Know

that none of us is perfect, and all of us will at times fail. This will allow us to break down the walls of hostility and bring together the near and far. That’s what the life of Christ made possible, and that’s what the temple plans demand.

**December 16, 2012**  
**Growing up**  
**Ephesians 4:1-16**

As we become more what God wants us to be and start working with others as the body of Christ, some self-reflection is in order if we are to become mature disciples.

We don’t want to be tossed about by every whim like children. We don’t want to follow first this voice, then another, that would draw us off God’s certain path for us.

And so we need to look ahead to the ultimate destination, to know where we’re headed, and why. We need to know what God wants us to do.

Knowing our purpose helps us set priorities that determine how we spend our time today and what tasks we take up tomorrow. It’s important for the work of God, and for our own sense of purpose and meaning.

But how do we know what God wants for our lives? It can seem daunting to decipher, but there are clues.

Some of it comes down to your current time, place, and those walking with you, because God has given you all three. What in your life can only you do? God has given you that work. Take it up with vigor, knowing that it is part of God’s plan for you. No doubt this includes taking care of your own physical and spiritual health. Being someone’s son or daughter. Being someone’s spouse if you have one. Being someone’s parent if you are raising a child. Only you can do these things, so do them well.

What are your passions? God gave you those, too. Do you love to talk to people? To write? To build? To cook? Affinities that can serve others come from God. They are part of who God made you to be, and there’s every reason to think they are exactly what God would have you do.

Finally, what job can you do that will fill a need, that perhaps someone else isn’t as well-equipped to do, or isn’t doing? God wants you to do that.

On the flip side are clues of what God may not want you to do. Look at what saps your energy, because that could be a sign that others should do that work.

Acknowledge the closed doors, and know that God can speak to us through those, too. Perhaps you are unemployed, or underemployed. Take the anxiety about not having those hours filled and ask God to open your eyes to how you might worthily spend your time and talents.

Sometimes, despite your gifts seeming to be the right fit for a particular job, it may not be the right time or place to use them. And sometimes part of what we want has to wait. The young parent with a preschooler and a baby at home may be called to put career aspirations on hold for a while.

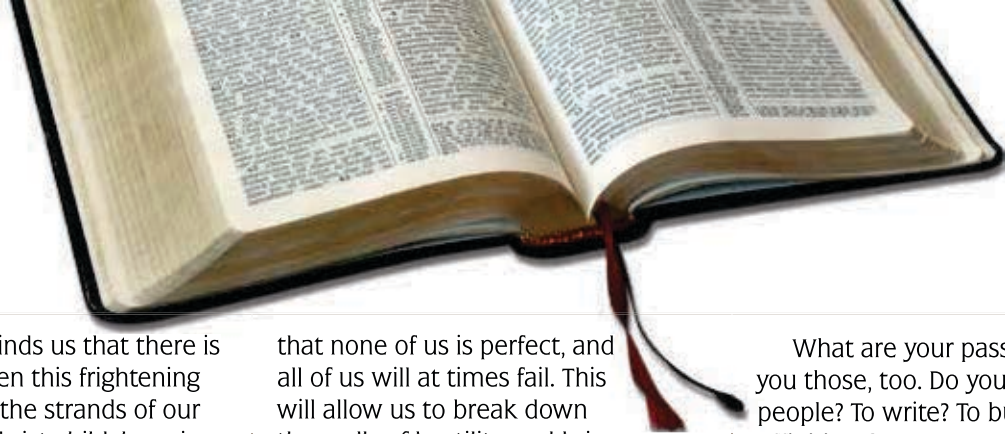
Once your self-reflection results in clear images of what your work for God should be, let it define your daily calendar. Sit down every morning and ask God, “What do you want me to do today?”

The body of Christ needs mature disciples who take the time to reflect, to listen for the one true God’s voice.

**December 23, 2012**  
**The wake-up call**  
**John 1:1-5, Ephesians 4:1-2, 6-14**

“Time to wake up!”  
They are an abomination,  
these four words spoken in

(Continued on next page, “Living the Word”)







# CLERGY & DIACONAL

(“Living the Word”, Continued from page 27)

the darkness of early morning to my 8-year-old son, Jon. This school year he actually pled with me not to say anything at all. “I can get up without your telling me to,” he said.

In our sleeper moments, our reaction to God might be just as averse, and just as self-sufficient. We may not want to wake up just now. We might want to linger in the darkness, to shut our eyes to what God wants.

But as children of the light, that’s just not going to be possible, we learn from John and Ephesians this week. And not only do we have to get up, but what we do with each 24 hours is vital, because in the morning sun of God’s knowing, all will be exposed. We’re to spend our days producing fruits of goodness, justice, and truth, Ephesians says.

Why is it this way, people of God? Because as poetically expressed in John, we serve a Savior who is an all-in-One: the Word, the Light, and our very Life. We don’t get one without the others. Sounds to me like a wake-up call that does it all.

“Wake up sleeper!” Ephesians 5:14 (CEB) tells us. “Get up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

As we prepare for the Nativity, so soon before us, as we ready for all that God’s incarnate presence in our world entails, what will you do with your day?

## December 30, 2012

**A body for Christ**  
**Ephesians 5:21-6:4**

As you read this, your poinsettias may be looking a tad droopy, your Christmas tree either out the door or depositing mass amounts of needles on your floor. The New Year is about to bloom.

In the past few days, it’s pretty likely that you’ve spent a little more time than usual with your family. If you have young children, you’ve had

them at home for maybe a week and a half. And if you’re like us at our house, you may be ready for those school doors to open back up!

If tempers grew short at your house this Christmas, know that in every home, in every family, there is conflict. It is simply the nature of family, and it’s no less true for our nuclear ones than for our church ones. We love one another, but we also rub each other wrong from time to time.

The writer of Ephesians knew this. He knew about the sharp words that could be exchanged, the disagreements that could fester. To counter the conflict, he encouraged Christians to embrace their unique roles within both family and church so they could work together better as one body.

I know I have issued plenty of sharp words in my family, and allowed far too many disagreements to fester. I hope I am mellowing with age, but something that has helped me on my way has been a sage bit of advice, picked up from a women’s magazine. (God speaks to us in all manner of incarnations!)

The sage advice was not to expect too much of any one person. You may want your husband to be and do many things: be your best friend, be a good listener, be a good provider, sweep you off your feet, play with the children, do the dishes, do the laundry.... The list goes on and on.

But that’s not possible. One person can’t be and do everything in your life.

Your children may not be able to carry the weight of your expectations, either. Just because you have in mind a flawlessly well-behaved child who makes straight As, God may have a different idea of just the child for you.

If we see one another through this lens, not expecting more than the God-given capacities of each member of our clan, we will see that the many relationships in our lives add up to exactly what we need. This is the beauty of the body of Christ, fitting

together.

It won’t work perfectly. No body does. No one can do a job exactly right every time. We might get sick, tired, or overwhelmed. But if there’s a will to serve one another well in whatever way we can this one day, then God can do something with that. God can do something with us. ☞

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## Deaths



**The Rev. Robert C. Painter,** 94, died Nov. 5, 2012, in Gloucester. Painter attended Bone Break Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, and was

ordained an elder in 1954. He served the Brandt-Union Charge in Ohio, before moving to the Virginia. Here he served the New Kent Charge in New Kent County; Pungoteague UMC

on the Eastern Shore; Good Hope in Chesapeake; Tabernacle in Virginia Beach; Pleasant Valley in Chantilly; Chase City; Ebenezer in Suffolk; and Mathews Chapel in Mathews. He retired in 1987. Survivors include his wife, Roberta.

**Paul Frederick Ferguson,** 57, died Nov. 5, 2012, in Richmond. He is the son of the Rev. William and Doris Ferguson of Glen Allen. He was a member of Discovery UMC.

**Frances Saunders Callis Nave,** 74, died Oct. 26, 2012, in Richmond. She was the widow of the late Rev. Lester Nave. She was a member at Welborne UMC.

**Miriam Walters Blevins,** 77, died Nov. 12, 2012. She was the widow of Rev. Reuben W. Blevins Jr. A memorial service was held at Chamberlayne Heights UMC in Richmond.

## Births

**Cora Howard** was born Oct. 5 to **Josh and Amy Novakoski Howard.** Amy is a seminary student and was an intern in the Virginia Conference office of Ministries with Young People for two years.

**Charles Vincent Locke** was born Oct. 16. He is the son of **the Rev. Sarah and Joseph Locke,** and brother to Jed. Locke is the associate pastor at Calvary UMC in Stuarts Draft.

## CLASSIFIED

Seeking a short-term Associate for Congregational Care (Jan.-June, 2013) at Fairlington UMC in Alexandria. In collaboration with the lead pastor and staff, the associate will implement the pastoral care program at Fairlington UMC. The primary focus of this program is supporting congregational groupings and teaching core Christian principles through a variety of activities. Reporting to the lead pastor, the Associate for Congregational Care works collaboratively with and supervises volunteers, assists in the development of the total congregational care program, and plans and supervises pastoral care education and outreach. **For details, visit the Virginia Conference website at [www.vaumc.org/jobs](http://www.vaumc.org/jobs).**

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# FROM THE BISHOP



## Fear not!

Time really flies like an arrow. It is already December, the last month of 2012. To me this year has been filled with joy, excitement and gratitude. I give thanks to God and all the members of the Virginia Conference for the opportunity to serve the Lord and His church. Because of God's abundant grace and your love and prayer, I have been able to carry out my mission to this point.

The month of December is the season of Advent and Christmas. We are preparing our hearts and minds for the coming of Jesus Christ. Our Lord came to the world about 2,000 years ago and is coming to us through the Holy Spirit now and will come again at the end of history. In this joyful and hopeful season, my prayer is that all of us will dedicate our hearts to be like a manger in which we hold Jesus just like the manger held him when he

was born.

In this season of anticipation and hope, our God says to us, "Fear not!" This is good news! We do not know the future. The future welcomes us with not only hope, but also with uncertainty. We do not know what will happen in the future. This uncertainty brings us fear and worries. But the Lord says to us, "Do not be afraid! I will be with you." Throughout the scriptures these words of encouragement and promise of presence always appears together. The reason we do not fear is because the risen Christ is with us. If we experience the presence of our risen Christ through the Holy Spirit, fear and worries will have no place in our life.

It was in 1967 that I found myself in a sanatorium founded by an American missionary. One night I had a very difficult time resting due to a lung hemorrhage. I felt I might die if my coughing up of blood did not stop. My heart was filled with fears, worries and anxieties. There was no peace in my mind, and I could not sleep on account of this fear.

In that dark moment, a lesson from scripture came to mind. It was Matthew 10:29-31: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid: you are of more value than many sparrows." When these words were given to my heart, my fears and worries slowly disappeared and peace from the Lord filled my heart. This was God's grace.

In October 1967 I underwent lung surgery at Severance Hospital in Seoul, Korea. The morning of the surgery God blessed me with a scripture lesson from the Upper Room. That day's lesson was from Joshua 1: "As I was with

Moses I will be with you. Do not be afraid. Be strong and courageous. I will be with you wherever you go." I was moved to the operating room with peace and assurance in my heart.

But the surgery did not go well. Because of bleeding I remained in the operating room for over 28 hours and received about 25 pints of blood. The doctors could not stop my bleeding, and so they just left me in the operating room. I wandered between life and death, saying my final prayer when I was conscious enough for awhile. But the bleeding gradually decreased and I was moved to the recovery room the following day.

I remained at the hospital for three months and suffered from numerous complications and infections, and the following year I underwent lung surgery once again. The Lord was my shepherd, but my path was very bumpy, painful and dangerous. These years of physical suffering, however, were golden times for my spiritual journey. I could fight with pains and uncertainty holding the promise of God's presence with me.

Soon we will celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ whose name is "Immanuel," which means "God is with us." The Christmas story reminds us of God's promise of being with us. Because the Lord is with us, we can face tomorrow without fear. Though we are surrounded by illness, economic difficulties and uncertainties, we are not afraid of the challenges we face because our good shepherd is with us and will lead us.

May the Lord bless all of us in this joyful season that we may experience God's presence anew. Have a blessed Advent and joyful Christmas!

*Young A. Cho*

# ONE LAST WORD



## Tweets heard 'round the conference

- Megan Saucier @megsaucier**  
It's too scary to tweet when you know that it's highly likely for it to end up in the advocate...
- Beth Givens @bethgivens5**  
Watching election returns with #vaumc #bom peeps in the newly renovated Carroll Room. #ElectionDay2012#weirdestelectionnightever
- Jonathan Bennett @jonbesailing**  
@bethgivens5 I was hoping for the frog bedroom slippers you wear for the BOM.
- Lindsey Baynham @LindseyBaPastor**  
the makeout lounge at Blackstone just came up in our meeting. #ohblackstone #longlive-Blackstone #vaumc
- Kristin Holbrook @HolbrookRev**  
Friday night lights at Salem High School. Supporting my incredible young people; so proud of them!
- Rev. Sarah Wastella @SarahWastella**  
If this hurricane rain keeps up, I'll be holding immersion baptisms in my back yard.
- Alan Combs @thricemantis**  
Hey who in the world came up with DelMarVa to talk about Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia?



## Pastor's Nativity set is a promise fulfilled

Hired as the Area Coordinator at Duke University, Doug Gestwick was to be in charge of 12 dorms and 1,200 undergraduates. But as he moved into his dorm, Gestwick slipped while carrying two glass lamps and managed to all but sever his hand.

Thanks to a Marine medic who happened to be there, and getting the best orthopaedic surgeon in the world at the Duke hospital, the pastor slowly gained full use of his hand. "The day after my surgery I prayed to God that if He would give me back my hand, I would do something to honor Him. The creche I've carved in response to that promise has taken 20 years."

In 1990 he started to make good on his promise. "I carved a manger scene using wood from all over the world. Mary and Joseph were carved from a piece of yellow pine that had been knocked down by Hurricane Hugo in my in-laws' yard. The wise men were carved from African mahogany. Each piece has its own story."

Last year, several church members convinced Gestwick to display his creation during Advent. "I did a sermon series, 'Come to the Manger,' and each week added characters to the manger story (and) the display. As I was doing this, I realized that a character was missing from my manger scene, and from all manger scenes – the innkeeper. I wrote to Efram Nissan, who owns a shop in Bethlehem where Christian carvers work, and told him that when I brought my group there in February I was going to want to get a large piece of olive wood. Much to my surprise, just before Christmas a large box from FedEx showed up at my door!" It was a 35-pound block of olive wood.

"I left the innkeeper featureless, so everyone can see themselves as the innkeeper. My choir is singing a piece each week entitled 'The Innkeeper' and the words ask each of us to ask ourselves, 'Today, do I have room for the Christ child?' The conclusion of the sermon series will be on how each of us needs to see ourselves as an innkeeper – a 'host' in the church, and not a 'guest.'"

The Rev. Gestwick is senior pastor at St. Luke's UMC in Yorktown.





# PLANTING SEEDS OF HOPE



## IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD

**"The hearts of children are like good soil, they hear the word, accept it and produce a crop... 100 times which was sown."**

**Mark 4:20**



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