

Advocate



Finding support
and compassion in
small and support
groups

Connecting with the



Virginia Advocate

The official magazine of
the Virginia Conference of
The United Methodist Church

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

Phone: 1-800-768-6040 or

804-521-1100

Fax: 804-521-1174

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

Detailed guidelines for the following
available upon request.

Subscriptions

Print subscriptions are \$20/one year; \$30/two years; \$40/three years. Special bulk rate for five or more copies going to a single address is \$12 each for one year. For both printed copy and online access, subscriptions are \$25/year; \$35/two years; \$45/three years. For online only, cost is \$10/year; \$15/two years; \$20/three years. Subscribe online at www.vaumc.org, under "Resources">Publications."

Deadlines

The Advocate is published once a month. The deadline to submit news and ad copy for the January 2017 issue is December 1. For more information on future deadlines, contact the Advocate office or visit the website.

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

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

©2016 Virginia Advocate

USPS 660-740 ISSN 0891-5598

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

POSTMASTER: Send changes of address to Virginia United Methodist Advocate, P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058. Editorial and business offices are located at 10330 Staples Mill Rd., Glen Allen, Va. Office hours are 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

PILLOW TALK



Madeline Pillow
Editor

A hair metaphor

At the time of writing this editorial, we are just a few days from electing a new president. It has been a very contentious political cycle to say the least, but I for one will be glad when this part is over.

What has been truly disheartening about this election is the way I've seen people react to each other. For people on both ends of the political party spectrum, if you don't agree with their candidate then you are a horrible, hateful person. If you even think about voting third person, you are voting for the other candidate, and you are selfish.

This behavior is reaction to internal fear. Fear of candidates, fear of people with different ideas, fear of the media. When did we start viewing "the news" as lies spouting from "those people"?

I don't deny that there is bias at times, but the news is supposed to act as information. If we just listen to news that we agree with, we aren't getting the whole picture. We are supposed to gather information to make informed decisions. You can't do that by only listening to one side or believing that you know what the other side thinks without even listening.

If you notice, my editorial picture changed this month. Now I could say that it's just a dedicated move to make my later metaphor really pack a punch, but no, it was a personal style choice. But for those who may not have seen me for a while, I also wanted to get the shock out of the way—I've freaked out a few of my colleagues in the last couple of weeks.

Time for the metaphor. For the guys who are reading, this metaphor may not come as easy for you as for the ladies.

When I was sitting at the hair salon getting my new 'do,' I had to calm my hairstylist's nerves and assure her that I knew what I was asking. I guess she didn't want water works after the dramatic change of color from blonde to dark brown—but I've done this before.

Now the process of darkening one's hair is not that glamorous. My hairstylist mixed the colors in her small bowl and applied it to strands of my hair, the dark paste attached to foil was folded up tight to my scalp.

Once it is all said and done, you sit in the chair with piles and piles of this glopped foil atop your head—looking more like a machine trying to attract the sun than a human.

It's this not-too-pretty process that makes me think of the before, during and after of this election cycle.

After my hair was rinsed, foil was removed, my hair combed out and then blown out, the foil-covered Madeline was just a memory.

I'm hoping the same experience for us. That once a decision is made in this election that we can move from the glopped-on-foil stage and deal with unifying ourselves and addressing the seeds of hate that have spouted from both sides. After all, the Savior we all believe in has done some pretty impressive things from unexpected and even terrible situations.



Madeline C. Pillow

TABLE OF CONTENTS



SECTIONS

- 4-6 Letters & Commentary
- 7-9 Virginia News
- 10 Local Church News
- 11 Events
- 12-13 Equipping
- 22-23 Living the Word
- 24-25 Clergy & Diaconal
- 26 From the Bishop
- 27 One Last Word



Scan this code to go to the
conference website:
www.vaumc.org

FEATURE

- 14-21 Finding support and compassion in small and support groups

STORIES

- 7 Hopewell church partners with elementary school for hurricane relief
- 8 Church's satellite chapel celebrates 10 years

The Virginia Advocate Staff

Madeline Pillow | Editor, Interim Director of Communications

Cathryn Huff | Graphic Designer

Pam Culler | Administrative Secretary

Board of Directors of Virginia United Methodist Communications, Inc.: Keri Marston, chair. The *Virginia United Methodist Advocate* uses the services of United Methodist Communications and United Methodist News Service. The reporting of news regarding any person or event, or the placement of any advertisement within these pages, does not constitute endorsement by the *Virginia Advocate* or any entity of The United Methodist Church. Opinions of writers are solely those of the authors and not necessarily those of this publication.

LETTERS



Finding monthly moments to remember Christmas

On the afternoon of Sunday, Oct. 16, I was in a large home improvement store searching for materials to reduce an exceptionally long “honey do list.” Christmas at the time was 69 days away, but not in this store. The massive display of Christmas decoration items stretched from floor to ceiling. I cringed when my eyes surveyed all this stuff.

While checking out, the cashier asked me how I’m

doing, and I stated, “I’d be doing a lot better if your fellow employees were not setting up all that Christmas merchandise; this is October!”

She laughed, gave me a nod of agreement and replied, “I know.”

With my check-out complete, I supplied the cashier with one final reminder, “Now you work on getting your management team not to set up that Christmas merchandise so early.”

Once again, she laughed and wished me a good afternoon.

Recently, I’ve scanned headlines about a few major malls and a growing list of large retailers opting not to be open on Thanksgiving Day. I think back to my childhood and remember the purchases I made that Sunday afternoon would not have been possible as just about every store in Burlington, N.C. was closed on Sundays.

Clearly, the world and all the madness that brings us to Christmas Day have changed. Try as I might, I’m often guilty of becoming caught up in all of the commercial trappings related to Christmas. In the days prior to Christmas, I have intentions of blocking all that marketing stuff out, as the blitzing sound bytes are just as annoying as a pesky mosquito on a humid summer evening. Just like my

swat at that mosquito fails, so does my block out.

Last Christmas, my wife and I spent our holiday in Chicago with our first grandchild, her parents and our son-in-law’s family. Unlike that stable in Bethlehem, we couldn’t all squeeze into their condo, so my wife and I stayed in a local hotel. After a wonderful late afternoon Christmas Eve church service and a delicious holiday dinner, we made the short walk over to the hotel.

The fierceness of a Chicago winter was absent, some of the homes along the way were adorned with decorations, but I was captured by something else; it was quiet. The hustle and bustle of the normal night were tucked away, not even a siren or the chaos of traffic could be heard. I couldn’t believe the still quiet peacefulness.

In our calendar year, there are 12 days designated as number 25. It is my hope in 2017, on each of those 12 25’s to find a moment to remember that Chicago walk and quietly reflect upon the light Jesus brought into our chaotic, calamitous world at Christmas. Lord knows I need it. Maybe you do too. Merry Christmas! 📧

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

Find Your Community

Experience UPSem
Richmond, VA
February 14-15

- Residential
- Weekend
- Blended Learning M.A.C.E.

Fully accredited
by the University
Senate of the
United Methodist
Church



www.upsem.edu/admissions

LETTERS

Words of wisdom from mother Mary

Never have the words “Let it be” sounded so sweet — or so important. That is how Mary responded after the angel Gabriel told the virgin that, through the Holy Spirit, she would conceive the Son of the Most High.

“I am the Lord’s servant,” she says, according to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 1 verse 38. “Let it be with me just as you have said.”

Countless paintings and stained-glass windows have sought to capture this moment. They depict a beautiful young woman faithfully accepting the divine birth announcement. However, what Christians recognize as Good News comes out of a very harsh and at-times ugly reality — one that typically doesn’t get the stained-glass treatment.

With an out-of-wedlock pregnancy, “she definitely would have been in jeopardy,” said Brittany E. Wilson, a John Wesley Fellow and New Testament professor at United Methodist Duke Divinity School.

Not only did she risk her relationship with Joseph and the economic

stability she only could get through marriage; she may have risked her life as well. Yet, she confronted all this danger for God.

As the Gospels show, Mary did far more than sit silently in a peaceful Nativity scene. She defied the social expectations of her day. Wilson and other



church leaders say her faith, bravery and prophetic witness offer lessons for Christ’s followers today.

“How can this be?”

At first glance, Mary would seem an unlikely candidate to bear the King of Kings. She was no aristocrat but a young Jewish woman in what was then Roman-occupied Galilee. On top of that, she wasn’t from a major urban center but from Nazareth, which Wilson said was a “Podunk, blink-and-you-miss-it kind

of town.”

The scholar also notes that Mary was undoubtedly poor. In Luke, Mary refers to herself as someone of low status. Luke 2:24 also notes that when Mary and Joseph present the baby Jesus at the temple, she sacrifices a pair of turtledoves or pigeons. Under Levitical law that meant Mary didn’t have the money to sacrifice a sheep.

Matthew’s Gospel hints at the kind of trouble a mysterious pregnancy would mean for a woman in Mary’s tenuous circumstances. In Matthew’s account, Joseph considers breaking off the couple’s betrothal, until an angel visits him in a dream.

What the Gospel doesn’t say explicitly is that Joseph had the option of pressing charges against Mary before the local religious elders. Such a move could have put her at the same risk of stoning faced by the adulterous woman Jesus later encounters.

Despite all this, Mary receives Gabriel’s announcement as a sign of God’s favor. In her own way, she doesn’t take the news lying down. Instead, according to Luke, she immediately hurries through the rugged Judean hill country to share

(Continued on next page.)

**Need a book? A Bible?
A music CD?**

**Shop Online
At Your
Virginia
Conference
Online Bookstore!**

Save 20% on most items and
Gain 5% back for Virginia Conference

Go to the Virginia Conference Web site, <www.viamc.org>
and click, “Resources >> Cokesbury Virtual Bookstore.”

*5% return offer does not apply to curriculum, apparel, online downloads, or official denominational items.



Financing For Church Vehicles



Rates as low as

2.20% APR*

on both new & used vehicles
(model years 2014 & newer).



www.vumcu.org

804-672-0200

*Credit restrictions apply and rates are subject to change

NCUA

Federally insured by NCUA



COMMENTARY

(“Mary,” continued from page 5.)

her joy with her relative Elizabeth, who by then is six months pregnant.

Wilson contrasts Mary’s trust in God to the skepticism the priest Zechariah, her in-law, expresses when Gabriel announces that the long-barren Elizabeth will bear John the Baptist.

“Mary demonstrates an open inquisitiveness; her faith is a process that responds to the divine,” Wilson told United Methodist News Service. “And the fact that she believes Gabriel’s words, whereas Zechariah does not, indicates an overturning of hierarchal gender structures as well.”

“He has lifted up the lowly”

Luke’s account of Christ’s birth and ministry continues to emphasize such social reversals, with Mary leading the way. When Elizabeth hails Mary as blessed “above all women,” Mary responds with not just praise for God, but also a description of the kind of change God brings.

The Song of Mary — also called the Magnificat, for Mary’s declaration that her soul “magnifies the Lord” — is not your typical Christmas carol. It shows Mary to be a prophet, said the Rev. Shively Smith, a New Testament professor at United Methodist Wesleyan Theological Seminary and

an African Methodist Episcopal elder.

She notes that the writer of Luke and Acts identifies Mary in a slightly different way than the other Gospel writers or even other Marys in the text. Instead of spelling her name the Greek way as Maria, Luke identifies Jesus’ mother by the Jewish spelling Mariam.

Smith said Luke’s original audience would have connected that spelling with an earlier heroine in the Torah — the prophet Miriam. In Exodus, Moses’ sister and protector has her own famous song celebrating God’s victory over earthly powers.

“Mary treasured up all these things”

Jesus identifies his family as those who follow him rather than his blood relations. However, Mary

proves to be a true disciple and member of Christ’s adopted family.

According to the Gospel of John, she instigated Jesus’ first miracle of turning water into wine. John also says she was one of the women at Jesus’ crucifixion. The Acts of the Apostles places Mary alongside the other disciples after Jesus’ ascension to heaven.

Carol Barton, an executive with United Methodist Women, noted that Mary modeled the kind of discipleship many Christians, including UMW members, try to follow.

“Mary was faithful. Mary also understood power, as is clear in the Magnificat. She was also resourceful,” Barton said. She noted that Mary helped find the stable and turned a feeding trough into a newborn’s bed. She also joined Joseph in fleeing with Jesus

to Egypt, away from a murderous Herod.

Mary is more than a role model; her story is a call to help the marginalized today, said Susan Burton. She oversees advocacy for women and children at the United Methodist Board of Church and Society.

“Mary was vulnerable because she was not valued by society,” Burton said.

That’s a problem faced by too many women and children today. Women can still face abandonment or worse because of rape or an unexpected pregnancy. Even now, she said, simply giving birth can put a woman’s life in danger.

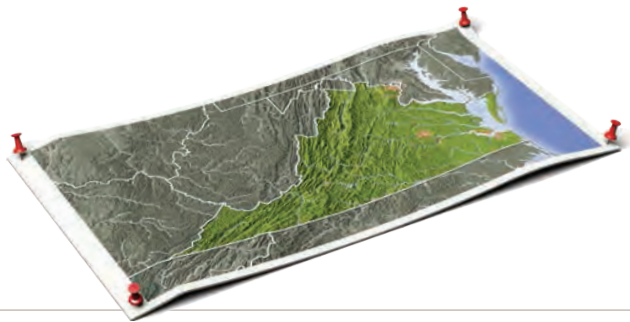
A woman dies in childbirth on average about every two minutes, Burton said, citing World Health Organization statistics. About 2.7 million newborn babies also die every year.

Burton and other United Methodists are working to improve life expectancy by helping women space out their pregnancies and get the prenatal care they need. She also is working with groups to prevent sexual violence.

“Mary is everywhere,” she said. “Our love for her, our love for Jesus and our love for God mandates that we stand up for all the Marys in the world.”

— Heather Hahn is a news reporter for United Methodist News Service.





The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

Hopewell church partners with elementary school for hurricane relief

By Madeline Pillow

What started as an outreach effort has grown into a partnership between one church and elementary school in Hopewell, Va.

Relief supplies were collected by members of Wesley UMC from students at Patrick Copeland Elementary School on Nov. 1.

The church had already been doing outreach at the school, particularly with faculty and staff, when fourth grade teacher Amy Pipetti consulted with the principal to see what they could do to help survivors of Hurricane Matthew.

Because of their growing visibility within the school, Wesley UMC pastor Jacob Sahms was contacted to share ways they could help.

Sahms shared the UMCOR flood bucket itemized list with Pipetti as an option for relief efforts. From there the project expanded past Pipetti's fourth grade class to include the entire school and then finally it was shared with every student in Hopewell through the school board.

The school collected approximately 3,500 supply items in about three weeks with Pipetti's class creating a graph to chart the num-

ber of supplies brought in over that time period.

When it came time to load up vehicles with the collected supplies on Nov. 1, Pipetti's fourth grade class was eager to take on the task and to show off their muscles in the process.

The collected supplies, including cleaning supplies, are to be placed within flood buckets, and clothes will be redistributed to those in need.

The beginning of a partnership

Wesley UMC in Hopewell began a visioning process in July of this year when Sahms started his new appointment there.

During this process, the church discussed their strengths and realized that

many of these strengths were internally focused, aimed at taking care of people who were already part of the church. That's when something called "The Blue Sky List" came to the table.

"This list was something the church had set aside if everything was going great that they could focus on questions like, 'How can we get involved?' and 'What more can we do?'" said Sahms.

Questions that were especially aimed at people outside of the church.

One of the first steps the church took to implement this list was by adopting Patrick Copeland Elementary School in Hopewell. The move has been met with excitement by church

members with dozens donating supplies to the school and multiple groups helping feed the teachers and staff at the school.

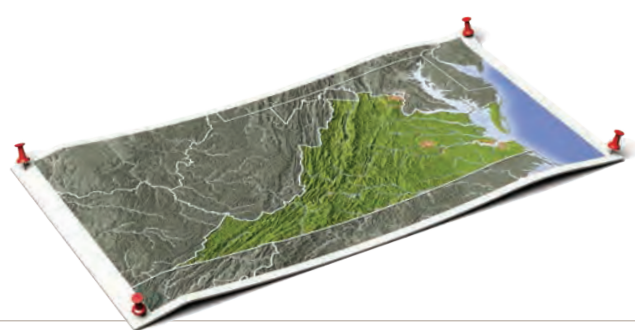
Already, Sahms said, a relationship has formed.

"We've seen some of the teachers and their families show up at our church and come to our Trunk-or-Treat," said Sahms. "The ability for people to see that we're making connections and that we're not just doing service but we're serving with people and we're making our community better, it's really changed how the church sees itself." 🍀

— Madeline Pillow is interim director of Communications and Advocate editor.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Church's satellite chapel celebrates 10 years

By Chris Smith

When illustrator Tom Messer was a child, he had a vision of the future.

"My forecast for the 21st century was shimmering glass towers," he said.

It makes sense that he should see the future in terms of its buildings, given that for much of his career, Messer has worked with real estate agents, drawing pictures of homes.

Fast forward to 2016, and this vision of the future is a reality for Messer and his neighbors at the Lansdowne Woods resort community in Ashburn, Va.

As a retired active adult, Messer's home is a set of gleaming condos poised on the edge of the Potomac River in the technological hub of Northern Virginia.

"This is a place where people are kind and concerned for their neighbors," said Messer. "Most folks are happy and out-going, and we're intelligent and inquiring."

At the center of Lansdowne Woods, Messer said, is the church.

"Every great structure needs an anchor to hold it steady, and that's what our chapel does for Lansdowne

Woods," says Messer.

Originally, the chapel was not in the plans for the community. Ten years ago, there was no space or program for worship at Lansdowne Woods. Like a lot of retirement communities, Lansdowne Woods sought to offer every amenity an older American could want from golf to restaurants. But without a designated chapel space, residents, who are all retirees and older adults, could not worship with their neighbors, but had to visit one of the churches in the area. Galilee United Methodist Church, which is four and half miles down the road, is one of those churches.

"I thought what the residents of Lansdowne Woods needed was a bus," said the Rev. Sarah Calvert. At the time, Calvert, who is Bi-District Coordinator for Church Revitalization and Leadership Development in the Arlington and Alexandria Districts, was associate pastor at Galilee UMC. She saw an influx of older congregants at her church, and a relationship was born.

"I learned that the residents of Lansdowne Woods had to travel some distance to get to nearby churches like ours. Some of



Pastor Matt leads worship at the Chapel.

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

them could not drive. My heart went out to them. What they needed was an easy way to get to Galilee," she thought.

The answer, it seemed, was not that Lansdowne Woods residents go to Galilee UMC. Instead, Galilee UMC needed to go to them. This opportunity arrived in 2006 when the Lansdowne Woods board agreed to include plans for a chapel space in the blueprints to a clubhouse expansion. Galilee UMC was invited to host worship on-site.

Galilee UMC senior pastor Jason Duley is amazed that Galilee took the plunge to support a second-campus congregation 10 years ago.

"Multi-site church growth is not something that denominational churches of our size do. It isn't really in the DNA of a traditional Methodist congregation to go off campus like that. The independent mega-churches—that's their strength. Satellite campuses require so much commitment and coordination," said Duley.

Yet, Galilee UMC did it.

A chapel room was constructed in 2006 with a maximum occupancy of 30. The Lansdowne Board thought that was more than sufficient—after all, Galilee UMC had yet to show that three people would show up on a Sunday morning. But the

newly-born Chapel at Lansdowne Woods was almost immediately too big for its purpose-built room. Forty-five believers gathered together for a luncheon with their new pastor one Sunday, and it was decided that the "chapel" had to move to the much bigger Monroe Ballroom. Ten years later, now under the leadership of the Rev. Matt Sergent, associate pastor at Galilee UMC, the Chapel regularly hosts 100 worshippers.

"The difference that the Chapel has made in the lives of Lansdowne Woods residents over the past 10 years has been incredible," said Sergent. "This group of neighbors has been shaped into an active body of Christ, serving in diverse ministries. They pack food for Stop Hunger Now and Backpack Buddies, send devotionals to service men and women through Strength for Service, donate school supplies for elementary schools and help children and those in need during holidays and in times of instability. Lansdowne believers have been given a focal point for their faith and sense of purpose. I thank God for it!"

The Rev. Sergent's own story is intertwined with the Chapel. He was a layperson at Galilee and a police officer when the future came knocking in the form of these grey-haired



parishioners. "I'd thought about going to seminary," said Sergent, "but I always put it off because the time wasn't right. I went out to the Chapel as a volunteer, never expecting that my own life would be changed by the community that I found there."

On Sunday, Oct. 10, the Rev. Sergent led the Chapel in celebration of its 10th anniversary as a going Christian concern with a special program of worship.

"What Pastor Matt, and Sarah before him, have been able to accomplish at the Chapel is astounding," said Duley. "It's a tribute to them and to the congregation. Think of it—a collection of believers where there wasn't even a chapel, prayed. And a police officer, who wasn't even a pastor yet, responded to that prayer to rise up, become ordained and lead worship that has been going strong for a decade."

"The congregation at

Lansdowne Woods is loving and unselfish," said Duley. "They have a strong self-identity and as vital a commitment to God as I have seen anywhere in the Virginia Conference."

What does Lansdowne Woods resident Tom Messer, the dreamer of the future, make of 10 years at the Chapel?

"It is a proven fact that my week goes better after Pastor Matt's message fills my ears. The congregation, all of whom have become my new-found friends, make me feel like I belong to a world that just might make a real difference." 

— Chris Smith is Communications Coordinator for Galilee UMC in Sterling, Va.

DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



To have your church or church organization featured in the "Disciples helping to transform the world" section, e-mail your story and photos to MadelinePillow@vaumc.org by the first of the month. Stories should be approximately 100 words, and photos should be 300 dpi jpgs.

Bon Air United Methodist Church, Chesterfield County, celebrated its 125th anniversary on Oct. 2. About 400 people attended a special Sunday morning worship service and celebratory luncheon. It was a day of looking back and moving forward as church members viewed a commemorative video, featuring members young and old.

Many former members attended the service, including ministers and those who went into the ministry from Bon Air. A highlight of the service was acknowledging Bon Air's newest member, one-month-old Susan Becker, daughter of church members Tom and Megan Becker, and one of its oldest active members, 99-year-old Kal Skeirik. Kal is a member of Bon Air's usher team and was in his usual place ushering that Sunday. A book of recollections by members of what makes the church special was published for members, and the church updated its history since its Centennial celebration in 1991. ▼

▲ In late summer, in keeping with its focus on missions, **United Methodist Women (UMW) of Leesburg UMC, Winchester District,** sponsored a panelist-led seminar on poverty in the nation's most affluent county—Loudoun County, Va.

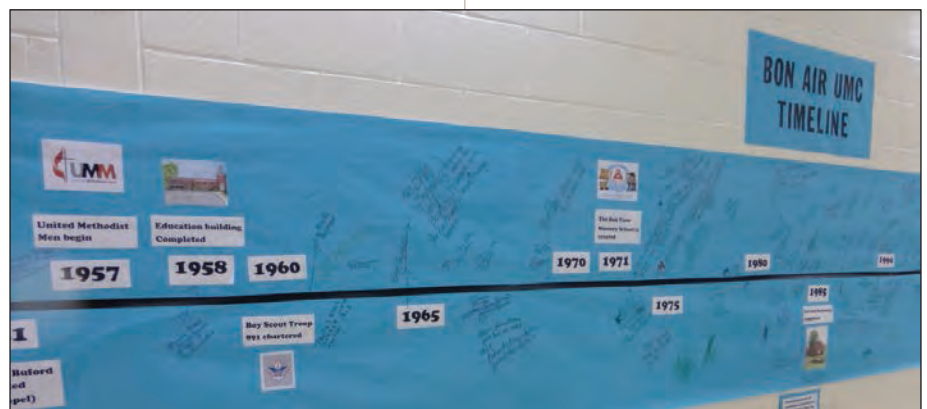
The panel consisted of representatives of six charitable organizations: Loudoun Interfaith Relief, Loudoun Abused Women, Mobile Hope, Volunteers of America, The Salvation Army and Loudoun Cares as well as representatives of the county Sheriff's Office, Leesburg Town Police and Loudoun County Schools.

These representatives informed and responded to approximately 80 attendees from throughout the county.

Pictured are LUMW members who undertook leadership roles in planning the Poverty seminar: (from left to right) Vicky Weaver, Polly Downey, Nancy Fixx and Betsy Creamer.

"Messy Church," at **Crossroads Mission Center, Fredericksburg District,** created bubbles with a tennis racket! Just one example of the fun

the church has while celebrating God in our lives. ▼





EVENTS

January

Candidacy Summit

Jan. 6-7, Richmond Hill Retreat Center, Richmond

If you are considering going into ministry, you are invited, alongside candidates for licensed ordained ministry, to the Candidacy Summit sponsored by the office of Clergy Excellence. During the summit, you can begin to discern your call to ministry with others, learn the requirements for becoming a certified candidate and initiate a mentor group. Attendees must be 18 or older. For more information or to register, go to www.vaumc.org/CandidacySummit.

Conference Legislative Network Celebration

Jan. 14, Centenary UMC, Richmond

The Conference Legislative Committee is hosting a 25th anniversary celebration of United Methodist Day at General Assembly, Saturday, Jan. 14, 2017, at Centenary UMC, 411 E. Grace Street, Richmond, Va. The event will start with registration at 11 a.m., lunch at noon followed by a program at 1 p.m. Pre-registration is necessary and child care will be available. Cost for the day is \$15 or \$35 for both this event and UM Day in Feb. if you register by Jan. 6. Visit this link to register: <http://www.vaumc.org/UMDay>.

February

United Methodist Day at the General Assembly

Feb. 2, General Assembly, Richmond

The Conference United Methodist Day is Thursday, Feb. 2, 2017. It is an avenue of faithful advocacy that helps participants look beyond mercy ministry and join together with

elected officials to make a difference and exercise the Social Principles of the UMC. Early bird registration and payment of \$25 per person must be received by Friday, Jan. 15. Final registration will be Friday, Jan. 29 and will cost \$35. Registration questions may be directed to the Rev. Barbara Lewis at BarbaraLewis@vaumc.org. General questions may be directed to the Rev. Pat Shipley at plsrevdoc@aol.com or to the Rev. Randy Harlow at crhncboy@aol.com. To register and for more information, visit this link: <http://www.vaumc.org/UMDay>.

May

Shenandoah University Youth Theology Institute (SUYTI)

May 1, 2017

The Shenandoah University Youth Theology Institute (SUYTI) is a new program, funded through the Lilly Foundation, offered to Christian youth as a partnership between Shenandoah University, Wesley Theological Seminary and the Virginia Annual Conference of the UMC.

The Youth Institute is designed to educate and inspire young Christians to become better leaders in their local congregations through deep and thought-provoking experiences. Each day at the institute, modeled after ancient monastic pattern, includes academic study and religious reflection balanced with immersive experiences.

The program is a two-week immersive experience for rising 10th, 11th and 12th graders (offered this year July 23-August 5, 2017). For 2017 there is no cost passed on to student participants, except a \$50 registration fee and the cost of travel to and from Shenandoah University.

Pastors and youth leaders can

nominate youth they think will benefit from this youth theology institute and students can apply at <https://www.su.edu/campus-life/spiritual-life/institute-for-church-professions/youth-theology-institute/>.

The 2017 session of the SUYTI is now accepting nominations and applications until May 1, 2017.

Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation

Publication Title: Virginia United Methodist Advocate

Publication No. 660-740

Issue Frequency: Monthly

Number of Issues Published Annually: 12

Annual Subscription price: \$15

Mailing Address of Publication:

Virginia United Methodist Communications, Inc.,
P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058

Contact Person: Madeline Pillow, (804) 521-1113

Mailing Address of Publisher:

Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church,
P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058

Name and Address of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor:

Virginia United Methodist Communications, Inc.,
P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058

Editor: Madeline Pillow, P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058

Owner: Virginia United Methodist Communications, Inc.,
P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058

Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities: None

Tax Status: The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes has not changed during the preceding 12 months.

Publication Title: Virginia United Methodist Advocate

Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: Sept. 2016

Extent and Nature of Circulation:

	Avg. No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
15 a) Total Number of Copies (Net press run)	3,399	3,063
15 b) Paid Circulation (by Mail and Outside the Mail)		
1) Mailed Outside-County Paid Subscriptions	3,273	2,298
2) Mailed In-County Paid Subscriptions	131	128
3) Paid Distribution Outside the Mails Including Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid Distribution Outside USPS	258	256
4) Paid Distribution by Other Classes of Mail Through the USPS (e.g. First-Class Mail)	26	9
15 c) Total Paid Distribution (sum of b-1,2,3, & 4)	3,688	2,691
15 d) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (by Mail and Outside the Mail)		
1) Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies	32	34
2) Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies	0	0
3) Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS (e.g. First-Class Mail)	3	3
4) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail (carriers or other means)	285	106
15 e) Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (sum of 15d-1,2,3, & 4)	320	143
15 f) Total Distribution (sum of 15c & 15e)	4,008	2,834
15 g) Copies not Distributed	-527	-53
15 h) Total (sum of 15f & 15g)	3,481	2,781
15 i) Percent Paid (15c divided by 15f x 100)	92%	95%
16 a) Paid Electronic Copies	140	161
16 b) Total Paid Print Copies + Paid Electronic Copies	3,828	2,852
16 c) Total Print Distribution + Paid Electronic Copies	4,148	2,995
16 d) Percent Paid (16b divided by 16c x 100)	92%	95%



EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY

Focus Christmas outreach on relationships, not gimmicks

By Eric Seiberling

When done incorrectly, church marketing feels misplaced at least and manipulative at worst. People see between 5,000 and 20,000 marketing messages per day. Their email, Facebook feed and mailbox are stuffed with people and advertisers trying to get

attention.

Many church “marketing” companies are nothing more than “tactics” machines. They offer customized postcards, a kitschy logo or a pretty brochure. Don’t get confused. That isn’t marketing. It’s just a tactic.

Is there a better way to connect with people during the Christmas holidays?

Start by remembering that some (but not all) new people who walk through your church doors want to be invisible.

Going to a new church, with its own standards and rituals, is scary. One church leader said, “Every new person that walks in through your door is in crisis.” A person coming to a church for the first time may be scared, perhaps in pain (missing something in their life, scared about raising a child for the first time, new to the community or remembering a problem at another church). This may be one reason large churches can do well during the holidays. Because visitors can slip in and out without anyone noticing them,

such churches intentionally try to make first visits comfortable for the “non-churched” person.

Offer something of value

Ask a simple question, “During this Christmas season, what ways can we be of value to people not in our church community?” Many people outside the church (and even in it) feel a mixture of emotions during the Christmas season, and very few have to do with our Savior’s birth. Christmas can be exciting, hopeful and full of wonder. It also can inspire fear, dread and depression. Think about how your church can help those in your community to manage the expectations and pressure of the “most wonderful time of the year.”

Think about your outreach program as a series of “dates” leading up to Christmas Eve.

If you are married or are in a serious, committed relationship, you know that it did not happen overnight. You needed get to know a little bit about one another before going out on a “serious date” or “meeting the family.”

The same is true for Christmas outreach. Think about the progression of a relationship and then consider having your Christmas outreach follow the same path.



Are you acquainted?

Every church has a reputation in a community. It is formed by the way the church building looks and is maintained, the messages on the church sign, the events and causes the congregation sponsors and how the church members act in the community. Your reputation also includes your online presence through your website, email communication and social media.

Take the time to understand your church's reputation, both in the physical and the virtual world. Do people recognize the excellent preschool that shares your building? Are they familiar with the chicken barbecue held every year? Do people know that your congregation helps the poor? Is the church famous for its great music program? The key is to understand your church's strengths and then to create a series of elements around it leading to Christmas.

Create a series of opportunities to connect during the season

Brainstorm a list of events and activities that are consistent with what your church is known for, offer value to those you are trying to reach and reflect the message of love, hope, joy and grace of Christmas.

For example, people know a church in Cincinnati for the quality of its traditional music. The church focuses on it with a Christmas cantata and caroling in the surrounding community, including shopping malls and downtown. If your church is known for its food, offer FREE dinners and cookie giveaways. Avoid the temptation of selling items, which runs counter to the idea of the gift of Jesus. If your church has people interested in drama, create a public Christmas pageant or walk-through Nativity. If it is prayer, place prayer boxes in local places of business, hold community prayer services for peace and other events to pray for others. Think about how to create a series of events that can lead up to Christmas to create a series of invitational moments.

Planning your outreach efforts around your current strengths and reputation makes it feel authentic and not a manipulation of people to get them to engage with your church. It also helps the people in your church feel comfortable because they are already good at what you plan to do.


Follow up with people who attend your events

At the events, tell people about other events

at the church and invite them to the Christmas Eve service. Provide a response card for them to request more information about the church or get reminders about other church events. Create a way for them to respond at the event.

If you have contact information, send a handwritten thank-you note. Avoid overlooking people in need by letting them know that you appreciate their attendance and would love to pray for them and see them again. Remind them of the next event and provide a way for them to get more information by phone, email, text or Web.

Be patient and persistent

Outreach at any time of the year takes time, patience and persistence. It requires everyone at the church to be engaged and willing to invite others so the community can become acquainted with the church. It takes effort to execute events with excellence and to create a relationship with others. It requires sacrifice out of love. In the end, isn't this what Christmas is all about? 

— United Methodist Communications

Finding support and compassion

When two of you get together on an earth and make a prayer of it, my Father will put it into action. And when two or three are gathered in my name because of me, you can be sure that I will be there with you and will

MATTHEW 18: 20B (THE MESSAGE)



Photo courtesy of Joy Chappell.

on in small and support groups

anything at all on
her in heaven goes
of you are together
at I'll be there."



In the Virginia Conference, the approximate 1,200 local churches illustrate the diversity and individuality of the state. While no church is the same in its gifts and graces, in the same way, no church shares the exact same problems.

It is through the creation of small and support groups where a church can tailor itself to the needs of its congregation and its community.

At Evergreen Church in Leesburg, LeeAnn George was approached by her pastor to lead a group called "Challenging Children." Meeting together for almost a year now, this group of moms has something in common, children with special needs.

George said these children run the spectrum from behavior difficulty to high-functioning autism, but all have a type of diagnosis. As a mother of a child with high-functioning autism, George said the group is all about support.

"We usually share stories, our ups and downs, frustrations and joys."

Another group, the C.A.R.E (Caregivers' Afternoon Respite Event) Committee, now in its third year, offers participants a variety of activities, giving caregivers an afternoon off. The group serves the community at McKendree UMC in King William County.

Support and compassion are themes for both the creation of small and support groups in local churches. It is about sharing and sharing with others.

Continue reading this feature section to learn more about small and support groups around the state as well as how to form these groups.



Ways to develop support and small groups

By Lisa McGehee

Small groups, Bible studies and support groups are opportunities to meet people where they are on their faith journey. At Good Shepherd UMC in Richmond, our Discipleship ministry has grown from seasonal studies to multiple groups meeting weekly, including a new grief support group and a Mental Wellness Ministry. What steps can you take to grow a vital Discipleship ministry so that people can develop their relationship with God and live as faithful disciples in the world?

PRAY – Seek God’s guidance. “Without a vision the people will perish” and without God’s vision for Good Shepherd’s Discipleship ministry we would not be able to discern topics, leaders and needs of the congregation and community.

MINISTRY TEAM – It takes a village of people to implement and grow a small group and support group ministry – again, pray. Ask God to reveal potential leaders that have a heart for growing in their faith. Who in your congregation has the gifts of encouragement, faith, discipleship and/or leadership? Who has offered to lead a small group or Bible study? For support groups, who has expressed a passion for an area of support, i.e. grief, divorce, mental health wellness? Invite them to join you in praying and seeking where God might be nudging them to become involved.

VISION – Come together as a ministry team and seek God’s will for your congregation and community. What does faith formation mean to you? How do you define discipleship? What are the needs of your community?


For the past two years, Good Shepherd has been in a time of discernment and Strategic Design. Throughout this process we sought God’s vision for all areas of ministry. We prayed together and listened to one another about the ways our lives had been transformed through the ministries of Good Shepherd. We also reviewed data from The FullInsite Report available through the Conference. This report was one way we discovered the needs of the com-

munity. We learned that 33 percent of our neighbors were seeking support in the areas of addiction, recovery, grief, parenting development, marriage enrichment and mental wellness. Additionally, 34 percent were seeking prayer and Bible study groups. We added these needs to our prayers.

DISCERNMENT – Equipped with prayer, stories and data, our Becoming (Discipleship) Ministry continued to discern how we could best live into God’s call on our community of faith. This discernment occurred during several meetings in the summer. We went back to the vision for Good Shepherd to be “a place where lives are transformed through grace.”

Grace and hope are the foundations for all that we offer at Good Shepherd. We heard that our congregation had embraced Sunday School, small groups and Bible studies for all ages but the missing link was topical support groups. Parents of children and youth desired to gather to support one another. Those grieving the loss of loved ones and those who were experiencing mental wellness situations sought faith-based support. From these conversations and prayer, we discerned that for 2016-17 we would offer a grief support group, a divorce support group, develop a Mental Wellness Ministry and offer parenting support groups for parents. These opportunities would be available for the congregation and the community.

IMPLEMENTATION – we continue to surround these new ministries in prayer. The grief support group began in September with three facilitators and eight participants (with an equal number of congregation members and community participants). An information session was held about the ministry and the three facilitators each shared that because of their own experiences with grief and healing they felt called to the ministry. A group of mental health professionals, school leaders and staff have developed a plan for a Mental Wellness Ministry. A sermon in September kicked-off the ministry which includes an information page on our website (gsumcrva.org/mental-wellness) and partnering with the local NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) to offer support groups. Our Children and Youth Ministries are partnering with parents to discern support group models that will fit their needs.

We are excited to see not only the development of these new initiatives but how lives will be transformed through the healing grace of God. 

– The Rev. Lisa McGehee is an ordained deacon serving Good Shepherd UMC, Richmond District, as Associate Minister. Her specialties include Adult Discipleship and Communications.



Church's chapel class offers support for more than 60 years

By Ida Powell

Support group. Covenant group. Sunday School class? Yes, a Sunday School class belongs in that listing when three essential elements are present. So it has been for the Wesley Chapel Class at Centenary UMC, Lynchburg, for more than 60 years. Beginning as a group of young adults in their 20's, many of whom grew up in the congregation, it expanded as others starting careers and families arrived. During intervening years the nature of support has evolved with the needs of class members.

Scriptural support is foremost. The UMC's Adult Bible Studies is generally utilized with expectation of lessons read in advance and participation in class discussion. Since lessons are based on the lectionary, sermons often reinforce that day's lesson. Class begins with hymns carefully chosen to reinforce the lesson theme; the music also serves as a call to order of those enjoying lively conversation. Class time begins with news of absent members and prayers on their behalf. The lesson also ends with prayer, with the expectation that members continue to pray without ceasing.

Emotional support is an important second element, freely given over the highs and lows of members' lives. Together members have celebrated births of children and

grandchildren along with career milestones. At retirement members have helped each other deal with decision to refocus and redirection or withdraw and retreat. Never is support more needed or evident than during times of illness, injury or death, when the ministry of presence is freely given along with tangible support. During ordinary times a member exercises her gift of encouragement through cards and letters to shut-ins, former members now living at a distance, and others meriting a special greeting. Beyond the class, members lend strength to the congregation by mentoring its next generation of leaders.

As might be expected, physical support often mirrors the old advertising slogan, "Nothing says lovin' like something from the oven!" In addition to gifts of food when needed or when it is offered as a welcomed treat, others share transportation with those for whom it is difficult or no longer possible, or help with tasks now difficult. Even books are shared, either for information or entertainment.

With evidence of spiritual, emotional, and physical support, Centenary's Wesley Chapel Class exists as a support group for its members, remembering to "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal. 6:2) 🍷

— Ida Powell is a member of the Wesley Chapel Class at Centenary UMC, Lynchburg District.



Photo courtesy of Joy Chappell.



Parent support group remains strong after 13 years

By Becky Todd York

As the then-parish nurse for Vienna's Church of the Good Shepherd UMC in 2003, Mary Anne Noland was aware of a growing number of parents experiencing turmoil with their struggling teens. Noland, who also facilitated a community Alzheimer's support group, suggested the church start a confidential parent support group. She understood the value of support groups – providing a listening ear and a sense of community to people dealing with similar issues.

Initially for the first few months, the group for parents of teens struggling with emotional or behavioral problems met weekly. Then the group settled into a regular monthly meeting, a schedule that continues today. Now it also includes parents of struggling young adults.

Like other parent support groups, Good Shepherd's group is designed to provide a setting in which parents can find ways to cope with a troubled teen or young adult, reduce stress and exchange information as appropriate. The format is to allow each member to briefly share what he/she wants, knowing that it will be held in confidence. The group is not there to "fix" a given situation, but to be a place of acceptance, trust and caring for parents who are often truly suffering in difficult family situations. The group opens and closes each meeting in a brief prayer.

"The support group gives me a place where I don't have to sugarcoat our child's problems and where I can see kind, loving parents who are trying so hard, just as I am," said one parent in the group. "It is okay to be truthful about some of the hard, messy, sad parts of my life."

Living in a community with many well-educated parents with many highly successful children can be challenging for parents whose children are struggling.

"It's hard not to feel like a failure talking with other parents sometimes," the parent added. "It's a relief to go to a group where you feel people actually do want to know the truth."

The group through the years has regularly drawn members from both inside and outside the church and from other faiths as well. Some have come after hearing of the church group through other community support groups or have been referred by a friend.

One parent in the community drove by the church one day and saw the meeting advertised on the church's roadside electronic sign and came that night for support.

Some members learned of the group after the church hosted several community forums with educational consultant Carol Maxym, author of the book *Teens in Turmoil: A Path to Change for Parents, Adolescents, and Their Families*.

"Our meetings have been an oasis of sanity for me, especially in the days when I seemed to be lurching from one crisis to another," said a parent, who has continued to attend the support group though her children are now young adults. "The encouragement I receive from the other parents sustains me and gives me hope, and we always find something to laugh about in the midst of the turmoil. One of the biggest lessons to come out of these meetings is learning how to parent without being co-dependent. Unfortunately, I can't say I've mastered this skill, but I know that I can count on getting a refresher at the next meeting!"

"It's a place where I feel it's safe to share and even vent," another parent said. "I've also felt my faith has been strengthened by being supported by this group that has stood with me during some trying times." 🍀

—Becky Todd York has facilitated the parent support group since Mary Anne Noland and her husband, The Rev. Jim Noland, moved to Richmond, Va., in 2006. Mary Anne passed away this May.





Social group at two churches welcomes community adults with mental disabilities

By Ann Journell and Debbie Tanis

Windsor Hills UMC and Northview UMC, Roanoke District, welcome adults with mental disabilities into their churches once or twice each month for socialization, fellowship, good food and fun. We are among a group of six local congregations that host groups such as ours. We have received referrals from our local Community Services Board or private providers. Each Church group serves around 25 people, and that number is limited due to the transportation we are able to provide.

The purpose of Church Social Club is to provide a sense of community and support to adults living in adult home situations or living independently. We want to reduce the isolation of our friends and give them something to look forward to. We want to take them out of their homes and bring them into a safe and comfortable setting where they are greeted with hugs and smiles from people who care about them.

We remember their birthdays, which for many will be the only card or gift they will receive. We encourage socialization by engaging each person in conversation, as we are blessed to have willing volunteers who circulate around to each table, addressing our members by name and asking them how they've been since the last time we met. Our special friends need someone to listen to them. Listening is the most important skill set our volunteers bring to the meetings. We then provide activities/programs which include music, games, devotions, and refreshments. Good food motivates, and our attendance is excellent with the anticipation of breaking bread with people who care about

them. We also enjoy two special events each year when the six Church Social Clubs gather together for a Spring Dance with about 125 attendees as well as a Fall Picnic with games and prizes at the local American Legion facility.

And, Christmas, well, you need to be present in the fellowship hall to fully appreciate the excitement that builds as we await the arrival of Santa bringing gifts to each Church Social Club member. The laughter and the shouts of delight tell the story! It is truly the highlight of the year. We also share the story of the birth of our Savior and many are willing to read Scripture and witness what the true meaning of Christmas is all about. We sing Christmas carols and pass out "stocking" gift bags filled with fruit and candy! Come and visit. You will be blessed.

We encourage socialization by engaging each person in conversation, as we are blessed to have willing volunteers who circulate around to each table, addressing our members by name and asking them how they've been since the last time we met.

Each time we meet it feels like a homecoming. Everyone is greeted with hugs and affirmation and there is joy and laughter filling our fellowship halls. These special groups embracing our special friends reflect their name: Church Social Club. 🍷

— Ann Journell is a member of Northview UMC and Debbie Tanis is a member of Windsor Hills UMC.

Finding a Place at the Table: Small Groups at Shenandoah



Photo courtesy of Joy Chappell.

By Joy Chappell

It took me two years to find my home away from home in college. Until my junior year, I had not stepped out of the bubble that was my major and met others who shared my same desire to dig deeper into my faith and ask hard questions.

"Home Sweet Home," a group Bible Study led by The Rev. Dr. Justin Allen, Shenandoah University's Dean of Spiritual Life, changed my college experience for the better. I quickly learned the importance of setting aside time each week to lift people up in prayer and truly think about this message we all want to live out.

In a university setting, it can be difficult for students to find a group that feels like home, a place where they can share what is on their hearts and minds without concern for being judged. The challenge of finding a support system and a safe place to talk about life and God's message, when balancing academics, extracurricular activities and a social life is something many college students have to face. John Wesley believed in the support, accountability and relationships that small groups, or rather his class meetings, can create. When others are relying on your presence and you on theirs, you are more likely to make the time to gather, be still and worship together. This idea of having strength in

numbers with regards to ministry is also modeled by Jesus as he sends forth his disciples in pairs.

There is a focus within Spiritual Life and throughout campus to welcome ALL people to the table; therefore, the Office of Spiritual Life strives to provide groups that every individual can be a part of, including both gender specific and co-ed groups. There are even groups that are focused on specific topics. "Q in Question" provides a safe space for students to discuss sexual orientation, gender identity and Christianity, with people who offer love, support and guidance. For students who are passionate about justice, diversity, Christian Scripture and God's call to be one with each other, there is a group called, "Racial Identity and the Spiritual Journey." Both groups allow for students to open up about tough subjects, knowing that they are respected and safe.

Having the opportunity to meet off campus is something the students enjoy as it often means a home cooked meal. One of Shenandoah's staff members, the Rev. Colleen Preuninger, has students over to her house once a week for dinner. In inviting students into her home, she models how people should be in community with one another, exploring ways to invite others to their table.

Over time, small groups at Shenandoah have multiplied and developed in many ways. A group of women who met initially at Home Sweet Home, decided to form an all female group and continue to gather every Sunday. This particular group became my family through my junior and senior year. The success of this group of women, as they enter their third year, is a testimony to their devotion to studying the Lord's message as well as their support and dedication to each other.

The small groups that we have at Shenandoah are outlets for students to form relationships of love and trust. Students from different years, majors, backgrounds and circles of friends have an opportunity to meet and love people who they may not have otherwise taken the chance to get to know. These small groups are important as a means for studying Scripture and talking about faith, but more importantly they are an example of how we live out God's message of loving all people, and welcoming all to our table.

— Joy Chappell is a candidate for her Bachelor's of Fine Arts in Dance at Shenandoah University as well as an intern with the Office of Spiritual Life.



National organization provides structure for church's grief support group

Griefshare.org is a worldwide organization that supports persons going through the stages of grief. At St. Matthias UMC, Fredericksburg, Carolyn Hendrickson leads a Griefshare group at the church.

Based on Christian ideals, the group mainly provides comfort and guidance. This past year, St. Matthias UMC has offered two 13-week series as well as a "Surviving the Holidays" series right before Thanksgiving which can teach participants healthy ways to get through the holidays as well as how to start new traditions.

Though not a goal of the program, Hendrickson said that the support group has attracted new members to the church, showing that the group fills a need within the community.

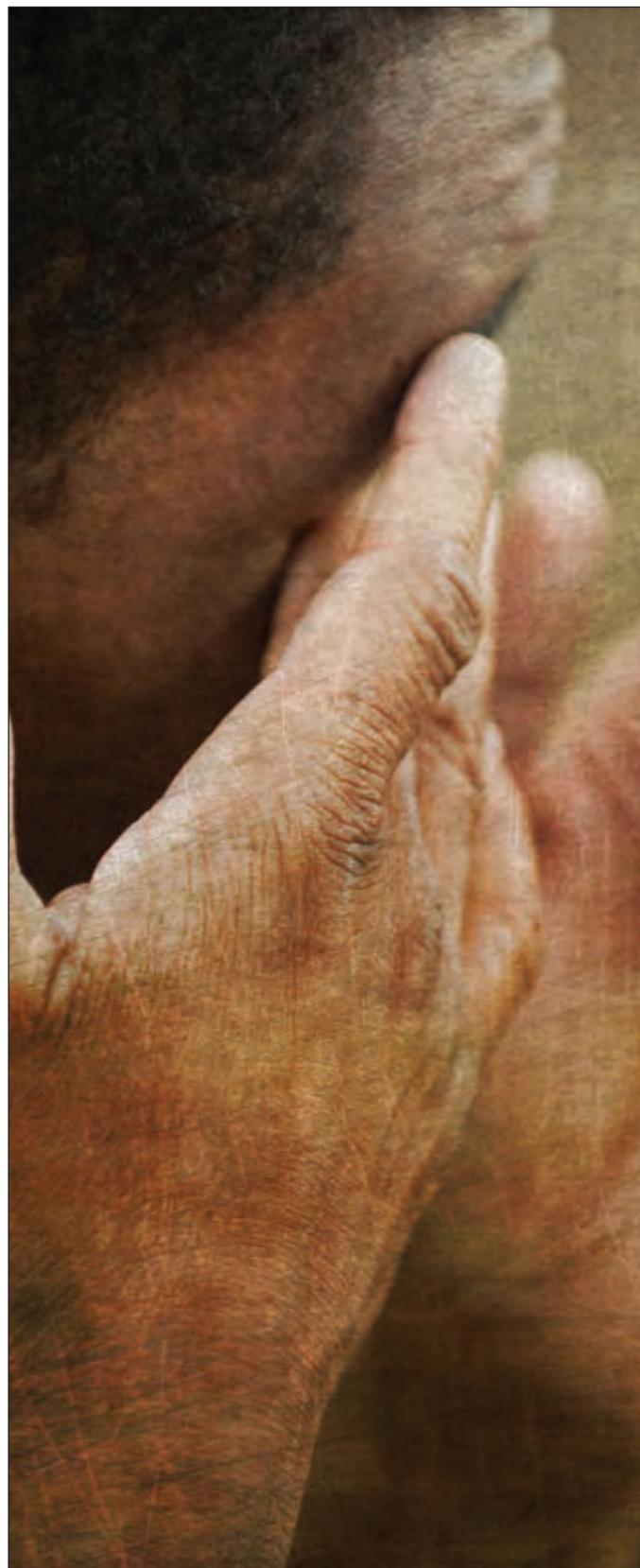
"We become like a family. Members often repeat the series and they are able to get new meaning even the second time around," said Hendrickson.

For the Rev. Pat B. Tony, pastor at St. Matthias UMC, the group provides hope as well as support.

"Our vision for this ministry continues to be to nurture disciples as we involve and train new leaders reaching out into our community with the transforming love of Christ," said Tony. "The impact on the congregations continues to be loving connections, meeting needs together across the denominational lines, all for the glory of God."

For members of the congregation including Margaret Ann Holt whose husband Dr. William H. Holt died about a year ago, the group is a space to share pain and to talk about faith.

"Grief is hard work," Holt said. "For me, as a Christian, I can't really discuss my grief without including my thoughts about my faith. I can't imagine getting through the difficult journey without God being with me through it all." 🍀



Devotions from International Lesson Series

LIVING THE WORD



Your Advocate editor decided it was time to dust off her brain this month and revisit her Catholic high school days filled with religious courses and her Hebrew Scripture college days, bring out the concordance and take a crack at the devotionals for the month herself.

Jan. 1, 2017

"Praise is active, not passive"
Psalm 33:1-9

I remember sitting in a religion class, probably when I was in middle school, and we were discussing heaven and what our life in heaven would be like.

I wish I knew exactly how the conversation went but the only image that I remember was the idea that I would become a blob of light. I have held onto that idea all these years — this image of myself bobbing up and down as a little light: a golden-white light, small, bobbing up and down. I didn't even get crazy in my imaginings — I could have become a little blue or multi-colored light I suppose, but maybe a golden-white light seemed more heavenly.

My point is that for a good amount of time, I imagined my time in heaven as praising God and bobbing up and down as a light. Can you say exciting? Insert my sarcastic face.

Christians have allowed the idea of heaven to slowly filter down into the boring images of lounging angels on clouds and believe that this is heaven, this is praising God on earth and in heaven. It makes me think: how often do I let praise of God become a stale, passive thing? How often does praising God on Sunday morning become a habit rather than an active opportunity to talk and praise God?

In our verses today, our psalmist describes praise to the Lord. Notice the action of this praise in these verses. There is praise with a lyre, creation of melody, praise with a harp, song creation, praise with strings and shouting.

Even in this psalm, the active praise here reminds us of our need to be active in creation around us. When God created the heavens "and all their host by the breath of his mouth," we weren't supposed to be separate from His creation, from the work of His hands. Our active praise should point to the work of God's hands to the greatness and true beauty of nature. In my opinion, a blob of light just isn't going to cut it.

Jan. 8, 2017

"At the sound of the drum"
Psalm 96:1-6, 10-13

In the key verse of this passage, the psalmist says, "O sing to the Lord a new song" which occurs in several other places in the Bible including Isaiah 42:10.

In this psalm, the repetition reminds us that we are all woven into this song. And this is not a short song. Think Mozart, think Beethoven. This is a feat of notes, timing and passion. We are swept up in a song that involves people we have never met and never knew existed. We are all singing now, and I think importantly to note here, for the second coming.

The phrase "for he is coming" is repeated twice here. Can you hear the music? At these words, the loud boom of the drums sound out. The strings and horns are at their peak. The nature imagery in this psalm is not just pointing us to our surroundings, it is also reminding us of what God will do. It is a reminder that we have not been left here anchor-less.

"He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth." (Psalm 96:13)

This psalm combines our sense of awe in nature and our belief in the Creator's justice and truth which ultimately culminates into our hope at the second coming.

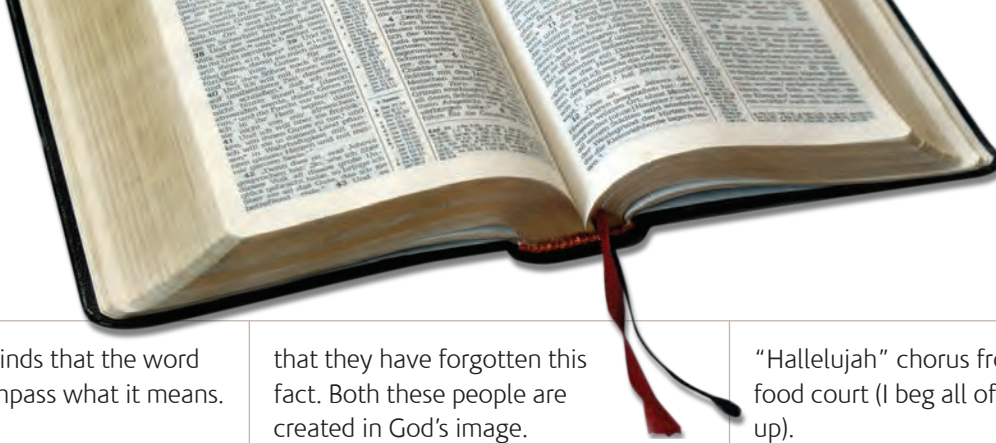
Jan. 15, 2017

"Lessons in grammar"
Psalm 65; 67: 6-7

I can still remember my mom pulling down her grammar book from the bookcase and imprinting in my brain that I could not end a sentence with a preposition. My love of writing has spanned almost my entire life and you can easily trace how my mom traveled the journey with me and influenced me.

It might also be this same part of my brain that recalls how much she hates the word "awesome." So whenever I see that word, that is always my first thought.

She might just hate how it sounds, but it also



might be that she finds that the word doesn't fully encompass what it means. I think so.

We as humans have tried our best to sum up the greatness of God, the full beauty and wonder of creation. But I think that the word "awesome" fails almost every time.

In this passage, the psalmist, in my eyes, is doing the utmost best to describe the majesty of God's creation. There isn't a reliance on one word to try to encompass all of nature; it probably isn't possible. But the description is abundant at trying to grasp the sheer magnitude of what God has created and takes part in continuously. Explore this through phrases like "you water its furrows abundantly," "softening it with showers" and "your wagon tracks overflow with richness."

This psalm teaches us our own grammar lesson in the use of adjectives. In their flagrant use of adjectives and in the descriptive language here, there is a form of praise and liturgy. When we highlight what God has created, and really see it, there is a different kind of praise.

Jan. 22, 2017

"Created in God's image"

Psalm 104:1-4; 24-30

I saw a picture on the Internet recently that pictured Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton with text that said, "Remember that both are created in God's image."

It was a picture that gave me pause especially in the angry and confrontational light of this election season. A lot of hate has risen to surface in our nation and the major political parties. I have seen a lot of Christians in the news and on social media engage in this anger and hate speech, and I know

that they have forgotten this fact. Both these people are created in God's image.

As hard as it might be to take—it is true. Here, the psalmist uses a more relational tone stating what God has done and how they connect to humans.

In reading this passage, all I can think about is how bad, at least to me, the world has seemed during the election period. And because of the ever shrinking world with social media and the media, bad news travels faster than it ever has before. It would be easy to say the world is no longer a good place. This passage reminds us of all the good though. All of the wonderful and imaginative and good.

There is a quote I really like that says, "All sunshine makes the desert."

The sun is life-giving and it makes the surroundings glow with its fullness. But too much sunshine creates an inhabitable place. A place that makes it hard for survival on the surface.

This passage reminds us of the good and reminds us that all the bad, even the bad of this election, is part of something bigger and is slowly, maybe almost imperceptibly to us, being molded before our eyes into the wonderful.

Jan. 29, 2017

"Praise through a flash mob"

Psalm 148

Have you ever heard of a "flash mob?" It's a group of people who come together in a public place at an agreed upon time and usually sing or dance together and then disband as if nothing happened. The results are fantastic.

A video on YouTube shows a flash-mob singing George Frideric Handel's

"Hallelujah" chorus from *Messiah* in a food court (I beg all of you to look it up).


I have great appreciation and love for music and especially after so many years of singing the type of music. There's nothing quite like being part of a choir singing this piece together, hearing all voices raised—soprano, alto, tenor and bass—in exultation and praise.

Now not everyone has the same appreciation for this type of music or for religious music for that matter.

But in this video, as the voices raised, there was wonder all around from the crowd. Most stopped walking to watch and listen, others stopped eating to gaze.

It was a moment of sheer wonder. A "wow" moment.

There is something about the way this music is arranged that translates even to those who aren't religious, how it translates to awe-inspiring praise to the One above from his creations.

The wonder is the melding of voices even as they break off into different melodies and words. We are part of the song. We all sing the song. 

CLERGY & DIACONAL



DEATHS

The Rev. William Eugene “Bill” Richards died Oct. 16, 2016, at his home in Falling Waters, W.Va. Bill served the Stephenson/Burnt Factory/Welltown/Brucetown Charge (1971-76) and the Middletown/Hites Chapel Charge (1976-79) on the Winchester District.

Louise B. (Bell) Lyons, 93, of Winchester, Va., died Oct. 14 at Winchester Medical Center. She was born in 1923, in Berryville, Va., the daughter of the late Alice and Leonard H. Bell, Sr. Louise was a chemist for DuPont in Richmond during World War II and was a teacher in Atlanta and Fairfax County, Va.

She was a member of the Braddock Street United Methodist Church where her husband served as minister from 1963-1971. She was a Sunday School teacher and was very involved with other aspects of the church after his death. She was also a member of the Lord Fairfax Garden Club and the Sigma Sigma Sigma Sorority.

Her husband, **Dr. William A. Lyons** (Braddock Street UMC 1963-1971), whom she married on June 14, 1947 at Duncan Memorial Methodist Church, in Berryville, Va., preceded her in death on December 12, 1981.

Louise is survived by her two daughters, Barbara L. Kahler, M.D. (Richard) and Nancy L. Sargeant (Tim); son, William “Wim” B. Lyons (Peggy); six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

The Rev. James “Jim” Lough Wilson, serving in retirement at Ridgeway United Methodist Church, Danville District, died at his farm in Henry, Va., Oct. 11, 2016. Prior to serving churches in the North Carolina Conference until his retirement in June

2011, Jim also was pastor at Galilee UMC in the Arlington District. After moving back to Henry, Jim served the Anderson Chapel and Ridgeway churches. Early in his pastoral career, Jim served the Mount Bethel United Methodist Church in Martinsville.

David Roberts, 56, died Oct. 6, 2016, after his courageous battle against melanoma. David was the brother-in-law of **the Rev. Kurt Ludwig**, pastor of St. Mark’s UMC in Manassas Va. He was a founding member of Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kan.

Bobby J. Copeland, 81, of Oak Ridge, Tenn., died Oct. 6, 2016, after battling cancer for over a year. Bobby was the father of **the Rev. Michael Copeland** who serves at South Roanoke UMC, Roanoke District.

David Arthur Russell, 75, died Sept. 30, 2016. He was born to Elroy Arthur and Esther Mae Russell in Marshalltown, Iowa, on April 3, 1941. When Dave was four years old, his parents moved from Iowa to the mountains of Kentucky, to serve as home missionaries at The Red Bird Mission. Dave developed a heart for people from an early age. He would ride on horseback (or a mule) behind his dad on Sunday afternoons to hold services for a small group of people in an isolated area.

He met his wife Phyllis, while attending Red Bird Mission High school, graduating in 1958 and moved to Virginia in 1964. They married in 1962 and just celebrated their 54th wedding anniversary.

David loved God and always served in some capacity in his home church and community. He was a Stephen Minister and an Industrial Commercial Ministries Chaplain. He always said he could serve God best

as a layperson, but God has a sense of humor and later in life Dave felt the call to pastoral ministry. He became a licensed local pastor in the Virginia Conference and served Salem UMC and later as pastor of Congregational Care at Ebenezer UMC, both in Stafford County.

Katherine Anna Cox Cheatham, 93, of Lynchburg, died Sept. 23, 2016. Katherine was the mother of **the Rev. Russell Cheatham**, who serves the Memorial United Methodist Church in Appomattox.

She was the wife of the late William Stanley Cheatham. Born in Lynchburg on Aug. 1, 1923, she was a daughter of the late Robert and Lonie Jane Harper Cox. She was retired from CB Fleet and was a member of Memorial UMC in Appomattox.

She is survived by son Russell (Julie) Cheatham; daughter-in-law Enid Ellis Cheatham; sister Louise Woody; eight grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

Oscar J. Olson, Jr., 83, husband of the late **Rev. Patricia W. Olson**, died August 28, 2016, in Alexandria, Va. A career Foreign Service officer, he served in economic/commercial positions in Venezuela, Spain, Mexico, West Berlin, Panama and Ecuador. He took an active part in the second-career ministry of his late wife at Hopewell UMC and Richardsville UMC in Culpeper County; Trinity UMC and Mount Horeb UMC in Catlett; and Springfield UMC in Springfield. He was also a longtime member of Mount Olivet UMC in Arlington and Messiah UMC in Springfield.

Oscar is survived by his brother, John Olson (Claudia) of Corpus Christi, TX.; a son, Michael Olson, of Amsterdam; two daughters, Kirsten Pruski (Ken), of Dallas, TX., and Kathy Olson

(John Beatty) of Allentown, Pa.; and five grandchildren.

Shirley R. Mercer, a retired local pastor in the Virginia Conference, died July 27, 2016, at her residence in Big Island, Va. She was preceded in death by her parents, Clarence and Ruth Strandburg; and her husband, **the Rev. Ira Vincent Mercer**. She is survived by two loving children: Ruthie Mercer, and Vincent Mercer, along with other relatives and friends.

Shirley served the East Nottoway Charge from 1996 to 1999. She then served the Massanutten Charge until her retirement in 2006. During her retirement, she also served the Big Island-Cove Charge for three years.

BIRTHS

Leonard Holland Gooch was born Oct. 26 to the **Rev. Katie B. Gooch** and her husband **Matt**. Katie is the director at the Pace United Methodist Student Center in Richmond.

Southeast Church Furniture

Beautifully hand-crafted wood furniture & accessories for

CHURCHES • CHAPELS

Pews • Chancel • Chairs
Loose & Fixed Cushions
Pew Reupholstery • Refinishing
Baptisteries • Steeples • Carpet
Stained Glass

1-800-333-5948

e-mail: akporter@verizon.net

 The Virginia United Methodist

Advocate

**EQUIPS
CONNECTS
INFORMS**

www.vaumc.org/Advocate

Lewis & Hitchcock, Inc.

Pipe Organ Builders Since 1915

11561 Edmonston Rd, Beltsville, MD 20705

Phone: 1-800-952-PIPE (7473)

Fax: (301) 931-2378

Pew Upholstering & Refinishing
Reversible Pew Cushions
New Pews • Carpeting
Complete Renovations
<www.churchinteriors.com>
1-800-289-7397
Church Interiors Inc.
The Nation's Leading Church Renovation Specialists.
High Point, North Carolina

For Your Printing Needs



**Benj. Franklin
Printing Co.**

John R. Overbey, III (Jay)
Ellen A. Overbey

1528 High Street
Richmond, Va. 23220

(804) 648-6361
FAX (804) 643-7114

Perfect to replace your church/school van.



**Safe.
Affordable.**

The Thomas Minotour® One of our hundreds of models and sizes of church buses. It combines reduced size and easy handling with many of the safety and construction features of a full-size bus.

Call for a free demonstration.

(800) 533-1006

**Sonny
Merryman Inc.**

sonnymerryman.com

VIRGINIA'S BUS COMPANY

**SALES AND SERVICE: CENTRAL VIRGINIA • HAMPTON ROADS • NOVA
MOBILE SERVICE STATEWIDE**

FROM THE BISHOP



Words of wisdom from Bishop Lewis' travel around Virginia

“As long as you are biblically and theologically sound, the sky is the limit.”

Bishop Sharma Lewis, Church Leadership Institute on Oct. 12.

“Fair is an action; fear is a reaction.”

5 Talent Academy on Oct. 4 in Stafford, Va.

“Faith is believing, obeying and persisting.”

5 Talent Academy on Oct. 4 in Stafford, Va.



(Clockwise from top left): Bishop Lewis and Conference Lay Leader Warren Harper leading communion on Nov. 3 in Jacksonville, Fla.

Bishop Lewis flashing a smile at a dinner for The UMC Episcopal Leaders and Spouses Class of 2016 at the Florida gathering.

Bishop Lewis in a candid shot while visiting Ivey Memorial UMC, James River District, for worship.

ONE LAST WORD



THEN
MARY
SAID,
“HERE
AM I, THE
SERVANT
OF THE
LORD;
LET IT BE
WITH ME
ACCORDING
TO YOUR
WORD.”
THEN THE
ANGEL
DEPARTED
FROM HER.

LUKE 1:38 NRSV



Detail of the by Antonello da Messina, 1476. Abatellis palace, Palermo, Sicily

Give a gift that really matters this Christmas

Many children UMFS serves have never received a Christmas present.

You can help change that.

Your donation of \$100 or more will provide a child in need with Christmas gifts like clothing, shoes or an age-appropriate game.

Don't let a child miss out on this season of joy and giving.

Give today.

Ways to give:

1. Donate online www.umfs.org/donate
2. Give to the UMFS offering at your church
3. Use the enclosed *Christmas Gifts of Hope* catalog



United Methodist Family Services does
not receive any apportionment funds.

