

December 2017

# Advocate



## LOCAL PASTORS

Shepherds after God's own heart



Connecting with the

**Virginia Advocate**

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

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# PILLOW TALK



**Madeline Pillow**  
Editor

## The Bibles are covered

**I find it fascinating to think back that, at one time, our access to information, let alone the Bible, was not always guaranteed.**

When Martin Luther co-opted the printing press in order to mass produce the Bible, this action completely changed the former structure of power held by clergy in the church.

Prior to this the laity may have never even held a Bible, and it took precious time for a monk to painstakingly hand copy one copy of the Bible. Mass production of the Bible allowed knowledge of the Gospel to become available to all.

It's something that I hardly pay attention to as I can easily access several Bibles as I write—an archaeological Bible, a CEB version, a NIV version. I can also find an online version quickly.

Can you imagine not being able to maintain and learn more in your spiritual life whenever you wished? What if you had to wait until Sunday and depend on solely listening to your pastor to get the Word of God?

So at this point, we have the Bibles covered. Walk into any hotel room and you should also be able to grab a copy. What don't we have covered?

Think about your local church – what commodity may not be accessible by all persons?


In today's technology-rich society, it might take you a minute to come up with it.

What comes to my mind is the rich community that can be created through churches and Christian life. It can simply be knowing what it means to be in relationship with God.

So while the structure of traditional church may be changing, and changing in ways that you don't agree with, today's society requires us to meet new needs.

Some ways that I see churches trying to meet these needs is through the live streaming of services, providing online small groups and more.

But just like the proliferation of the Bible and the lack of trained spiritual guides to help with Scripture interpretation, so too do we have to analyze the things that we do to create community and to make sure it is real, authentic and is being the church.

Technology and looking at new ways to be the church provides us new opportunities to spread the Gospel. Are we finding and taking advantage of all those opportunities? 

Until the next issue,

*Madeline C. Pillow*



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# COMMENTARY

## A solution to division in social media

By Pete Moon

One of my hobbies is working on old cars. There is just something special about an old vehicle that comes to new life after a good bit of hard work and persistence.

In this adventure, however, I consistently face this frustrating challenge: big, old, rusty, frozen bolts. They seem to defy every attempt to remove them. In my early days, I might have tried to squeeze a pair of pliers on those bolts and twist them off as hard as I could. Now I know better. A little pair of pliers does more harm than good. Now, I have learned to pull out my extra-long three-foot wrench. That, with a little heat and oil, offered carefully, will often loosen the bolt without breaking it.

I offer this story simply because it reminds me of the church and world we are living in right now. We are many things, but all of us can agree that we are divided, whether it be about church, politics or culture. Our division is like this rusty bolt that just won't come off.

Nowhere is this more evident than in our social media. A cursory read through just a few tweets and Facebook posts reveals



The Rev. Pete Moon is the Richmond District superintendent.

that we are wading in the deluge of our division. In the last several years and especially these last weeks, I have received a few emails and other allusions (i.e. complaints) about our pastor's use of Facebook posts and social media in the context of these divisive political subjects. I saw many of those posts and might find agreement in some and disagreement with others.

As I shared with those who brought those concerns to me, I wasn't as concerned with the political stance as I was with the unhealthy use of Facebook. It is important to remember how ineffective it is as church leaders to make these strongly worded Facebook postings. We may feel as though we are making a profound and prophetic stand to deal with the divided culture, but truth is, it is really like putting a cheap pair of pliers on a rusty bolt. There just isn't enough power in it to address or solve the problem. Usually,

it just makes it worse.

It is easy to forget that as clergy, not only do we have better tools, but we are also trained to use them well. We have this massive wrench that actually has the leverage to deal with the stuck issue. It is called relationship and face to face communication. Long ago we learned that we never seek to address a conflict through email. In the same way, issues that divide need to be addressed but they need to be addressed in the church in a holistic and healthy way. We can offer a sermon series where we fairly represent each side and offer discussion opportunities. We have small group discussions where we listen carefully to one another and have the possibility of feedback and clarity. We can voice our disagreements with a commitment to love one another and stay in the conversation. Facebook, despite its' name, doesn't allow us to see real faces. Real church does. There we see actual faces and hear and feel the real stories behind them.

So let me invite all of our clergy and lay leadership to think hard before you post that piece. Go ahead and share your trips and your family photos. Celebrate the great events happening in your church and people. But remember, we will not bring in the



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# COMMENTARY

kingdom of God by posting our latest passion on Facebook. It is like trying to put pliers on an old rusty bolt. We just make it worse. As the church of Jesus Christ, we have such better tools in our tool box. In this divided culture in which we live, let's roll up our sleeves and pull them out. Who knows, maybe this old car will stop knocking and start running again! 🍷

## Equipping, strengthening and inspiring the church

By Bill Pike

**E**arlier in the summer, our senior pastor, Larry Lenow, worked to gain approval and funding for a team of 14 program staff and church members to attend a church conference from Sept. 27-29.

The conference was at the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas. Home of the largest United Methodist church in America, 20,000 strong, four campuses and led for 27 years by their senior pastor, Adam Hamilton, their successful story has often been shared.

The first meetings of the church started in a funeral

home, then a school building and from there a succession of church buildings were constructed in a fertile Kansas cornfield.

At first glance of their current sanctuary, exterior sections of the new sanctuary resembled an angular spaceship with sheet metal panels and limestone.

Even though we were in Kansas, I would imagine Dorothy from the *Wizard of Oz* at her first glance at this architectural wizardry would restate her famous words, "Toto, I have a feeling we are not in Kansas anymore."

During the conference, our team attended almost nonstop workshops and sessions from experts on church leadership. Their goal was linked to the conference theme: "Equip, Strengthen, and Inspire."

On the first day, my session selections were mainstream — finance and human resources. However, the themes and topics in the large group presentations in the next two days pushed me into a different orbit.

The large group, general sessions presented a variety of speakers from seasoned veterans to fire-hot millennial church leaders.

A session with Tony Morgan, founder of the Unstuck Group, was an attention grabber. Mr. Morgan's topic, "Seven Stages of Church Life Cycle: Moving the Church from Being Stuck to Unstuck," was a real look at the life cycle of a church. The presentation he offered was sobering with a serious sense of urgency.

Morgan's work is grounded in four areas: assessment, planning, structure, and action. Additionally, a bell curve is used to capture the phases of life for a church.

Seven areas are the focus for accessing. These range from the initial launch of the church to the final sad action — placing the church on life support. Throughout this session, I kept thinking about our church back in Richmond, and where we might register on the bell curve.

One theme was clear

**Below: The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection is the largest United Methodist congregation in the United States, with its main campus in Leawood, Kansas. The campus's newly built sanctuary stands 100 feet tall and features a 35-by-100-foot stained glass window, depicting many religious stories, and seating for 3,500 people.**



(Con't. on next page: "HAMILTON.")

# COMMENTARY

("HAMILTON," cont. from previous page.)

throughout the conference. Despite the dismal data about churches and religion, speaker after speaker stated opportunities exist in this environment for growth.

## Church insight

During a break one afternoon, I asked a couple of questions of one of the key members of the program staff from the Church of the Resurrection. She told me she had been with the church from the beginning. My questions were simple: What is the best thing about the Church of the Resurrection, followed by what is the worst thing about the Church of the Resurrection?

Instantly, with no hesitation she answered "people" as being the best part of the church. But the second question rendered a prolonged pause. I sensed no one had asked this before. With a bit of pondering, her answer came back: communication. The rapid growth of the staff at times can make communication a challenge, especially trying to make sure everyone is on the same page.

## Waiting for a sign

From the time we arrived at the Kansas City airport until our departure, I kept on the lookout for



The Rev. Adam Hamilton is senior pastor of The UMS Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Ks.

Adam Hamilton. Although I observed him at a distance during the three days of the conference, here are my takeaways about Mr. Hamilton.

- ❖ He has never stopped learning, and he never will.
- ❖ He is a good listener with the ability to process what he hears from a variety of perspectives.
- ❖ He is attentive to details.
- ❖ He is a connector, a builder of relationships.
- ❖ He is a strong strategist with the capacity to adapt quickly.
- ❖ He is attuned to the needs of the community at multiple levels.
- ❖ He loves the Bible. Each conference participant was given a pocket copy of the New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs.
- ❖ He is human. When a decision or sermon topic

strikes a nerve within the congregation or people outside of the walls of the church, his heart too can be troubled when the feedback is negative and hurtful.


- ❖ He is so trustful of his relationship with God and Jesus that risk taking isn't a leap of faith.
- ❖ He does his homework. Because of this research, his communication skills are flawless. North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, would become putty after conversing with Mr. Hamilton.
- ❖ He is a deep thinker with the remarkable ability to make powerful points by connecting Scripture to real life.

## Get to work!

For at least the last 10 years, churches have sensed the foundation eroding beneath them. If churches plan to survive this slide, then churches must be willing to change.

Adam Hamilton knows all about change. His ministry has been built upon it. Making change requires work, very difficult and challenging work.

Perhaps that's why his parting words to us were, "Now get the heck out of here and get to work!"

I'm ready. How about you? 

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

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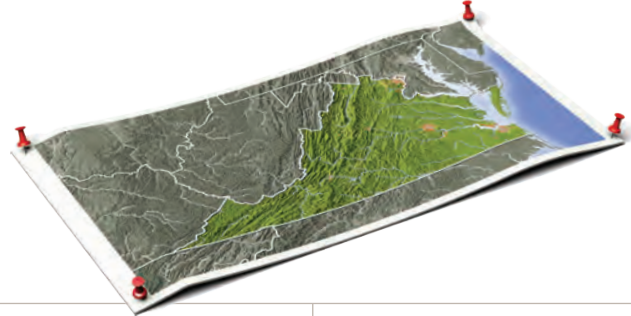
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# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



## Six ways the Reformation affects our world

By Heather Hahn

**W**hen Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on Oct. 31, 1517, he hoped to spark a theological conversation about repentance.

Instead, the German monk unleashed a revolution – ideas that transformed Western Europe and eventually the world. His posting on Wittenberg's Castle Church door might be the most eventful trick-or-treat in history.

Five hundred years later, Christians – and not only Protestants – are still living with the changes wrought by the Reformation he started.

Here are six developments we have today thanks to that fateful All Hallows' Eve.

### An expanded priesthood

Luther was not the first person to call for reform in the Catholic Church. But you might say he was the first to go viral.

The printing press, the Internet of his day, spread his ideas far beyond the university town of Wittenberg. In the days before copyright laws, different

printers had no problem with publishing the same works multiple times.

Think of it as the 16th-century version of retweets.

At one point, an estimated 20 percent of the texts published in Europe had Luther as author, said Richard Manly Adams Jr., interim director of the Pitts Theology Library.

The library – part of United Methodist Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta – is home to the Richard C. Kessler Reformation Collection, which includes the largest assemblage of Luther's writings in North America. The library recently discovered the collection includes two examples of Luther's own handwriting.

Among Luther's influential works are three treatises from 1520 that argued both lay and clergy shared in the priesthood of Jesus. This marked the beginning of the doctrine known as the "priesthood of all believers," meaning all baptized have direct access to God without a human mediator.

This equalizing idea shaped much of what followed.

### The Bible in everyday language

If all baptized are priests, they all should have ready access to God's word. That premise led Luther to what was perhaps his

most momentous work – a translation of the Bible into vernacular German.

He wasn't the first to translate the Old and New Testaments into a language other than Latin. However, Luther was the first to look to the original Hebrew and Greek in his work (rather than Jerome's Latin Vulgate).

"Some people say he wasn't such a great scholar of Hebrew or Greek," said Jonathan Strom, professor of church history at Candler. "But what Luther was brilliant at was developing a sort of idiom for the Bible, and it stuck."

Among the people influenced by Luther's translation was the English reformer William Tyndale, who likewise wanted to produce a Bible in his people's language. Tyndale's efforts ultimately led to his martyrdom, but not before he completed the translation that would help shape the Geneva Bible used by William Shakespeare, the Pilgrims and the translators of the King James Version.

Luther's impact is felt whenever people encounter the Bible in words they can understand.

### New ways of worship

Luther did not stop with Scripture. He also translated the Latin Mass into everyday language.



Photo from the Film, "Luther"  
(Rolf Von Der Heyt / Neue Film  
Produktion, Berlin)



# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

That in turn influenced the creation of England's Book of Common Prayer, which John Wesley would later adapt for his Methodist movement.

United Methodists also can thank Luther for making congregational singing a regular part of worship, said the Rev. Taylor Burton-Edwards, director of worship resources at Discipleship Ministries.

"The priesthood of the believers means the congregation needs not just to watch the whole service but to participate actively in the whole service," Burton-Edwards said.

Luther also encouraged Christians to pray together in daily services, said Lucy Lind Hogan, the Hugh Latimer Elderdice professor of preaching at United Methodist Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington. She is teaching a special course this semester titled "Luther at 500."

"He believed gathering frequently for prayer was important in encouraging people's understanding of themselves as part of the priesthood of God," Hogan said.

Luther's love of singing lingers in the choral works of Lutheran composers Johann Sebastian Bach, George Frideric Handel and Felix Mendelssohn.

## Mass education

The Reformation benefited from rising literacy that began in the 1440s with Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press. But reformers broadened literacy and educational opportunities still further.

After all, if you want to understand the Bible or join in a hymn, you need to know how to read.

"Protestants built new schools and wrote new catechisms, ushering in an era of lay education," said Anna M. Johnson, a professor of Reformation Church History at United Methodist Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary near Chicago.

Some Christians criticized this emphasis on theological education as privileging book learning over rituals, emotions and good works, Johnson said. The Methodist movement, with its emphasis on social holiness, helped correct this imbalance.

"At the same time, lay education has been a powerful force for lay engagement in the church, economic progress and democracy," Johnson said.

## Reminder of repentance

However, the Reformation wasn't all about empowered laity and joyful chorales. There was a defi-

nite dark side to the revolution and to Luther himself.

For one thing, the Reformation marked a splintering of denominations that Christians still live with today. Luther did not set out to form a break-away movement, but once Catholic hierarchy declared him a heretic, he opposed his former church home with fervor. He also was frequently at odds with other reformers.

Debates over doctrine soon exploded into bloody wars that would cause death and destruction off and on for the better part of a century.

As vitriolic as Luther was about Catholics, he was even more vicious in his late-in-life writings about his Jewish neighbors. His anti-Semitic rhetoric would echo in the brutality of Nazi Germany.

Strom, the Candler professor, said observing the Reformation's anniversary should also be a time of repentance.

"It's not just, 'Yay, we're Protestants,'" said Strom, who is Lutheran.

He suggested today's Christians heed the first proposition in Luther's 95 Theses: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' (Matthew 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

## Lady Liberty

Luther took on the power structures of his day when he refused to recant even in the face of excommunication and possible execution. His challenge to church authority also ignited other uprisings he did not anticipate.

He denounced the peasants who, inspired by reforming zeal, rose up against the oppression of nobles and landlords.

Nevertheless, Luther could not stop the calls for freedom that stretch from the Peasants' War to human-rights movements today. If people believe they should have a say in church, it's not a huge leap to believe they should have a say in their governance.

"Lady Liberty owes a great debt to Martin Luther," said David Teems. He is author of "Godspeed: Voices of the Reformation," a just-released Abingdon Press book of devotionals using writings by Luther and other reformers.

"Does the pope set up laws?" Luther wrote in a 1520 treatise. "Let him set them up for himself, and keep hands off my liberty, or I will take it by stealth!"

Teems called Luther "a true champion of the conscience."

Inspired by that spirit of defiance, a Baptist pastor named Michael King report-

(Con't. on page 24: "REFORMATION.")

# DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



▲ From age 8 to age 94, from Natural Bridge to Thaxton, Va., from church members to members of the community, 61 persons joined together to pack 12,000 meals for Rise Against Hunger at **Epworth United Methodist Church** in Thaxton on Aug. 26, 2017. These meals will be shipped via the US Navy to Haiti where they will feed hungry school children.

**Falmouth UMC** is a small congregation on the Rappahannock River District. In 2016, Falmouth Elementary School reached out to the local food

ministries looking for an organization to provide weekend food for some of their students. These local food ministries contacted Pastor Robin Be-Miller to ask if Falmouth UMC would take on this ministry. After prayer, the congregation knew that God was calling them to this ministry even though they did not know how they would fund it. Pastor Robin stated that "If God is leading us to this ministry, God will provide for it."

The congregation began feeding 22 children on a weekly basis. At first, they provided the food and prayed for God to provide the funding. As they continued, God provided funding through a Walmart grant, donations from a trust, a local building company and an electrical cooperative. This year, God has called them to feed 50 children on a weekly basis. The church continues to walk by faith knowing that God has called their congregation to this ministry and God is leading the way.

▼ **Wesley Grace UMC in Norfolk** held a 50th Anniversary celebration

for the Happy Hour Class for adults with intellectual disabilities. In 1967, several parents attending the church asked the church leadership to start a Sunday school class for their adult children with intellectual disabilities. No one in the church had any training or experience with working with this special population in an educational setting, but a few members gave it a try. The class was named the Happy Hour Class. Fifty years later, that class is recognized by the Virginia Conference as the oldest, continuous class for adults with intellectual disabilities in Virginia.

A banner commemorating the class was dedicated during the worship service. Linda O'Keef, a deceased longtime teacher of the class, was remembered during the service with a stained glass window presented in her honor. The class performed a rendition of "Amazing Grace" using bell-plates. A reception followed in the fellowship hall with various church members sharing memories of the class throughout the years. 🍷





# EVENTS



## DECEMBER

### UMVIM Team Leader Training

**Dec. 9, Floris UMC, Herndon**

Team Leader Training is required for all first time United Methodist Volunteers In Mission team leaders, but all interested persons are welcome to attend whether leading a team or not. The Virginia Conference offers sessions in different parts of the state. This event will take place from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Fee is \$35. Register online by visiting [www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org) and clicking on the corresponding date at the top right under "conference calendar". For more information email Forrest White at [virginiaumvim@gmail.com](mailto:virginiaumvim@gmail.com). Event is located at 13600 Frying Pan Rd, Herndon, VA 20171-3110.

### Christmas observance at conference office

**Dec. 22-27, Glen Allen**

The conference office in Glen Allen, Va. will close at 1 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 22 and remain closed through Wednesday, Dec. 27 in observance of Christmas.

## FEBRUARY

### United Methodist Day at General Assembly

**Feb. 1, Glen Allen**

Ever wanted to know how to create real change in our state government? Ever wanted to know more about real issues facing our legislature? United Methodist Day at the General Assembly is the place for you! This is an opportunity to help faith communities become empowered to serve as missionaries of justice, as well as the more traditional missionaries of mercy. Event will be held from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and participants should meet at

Bon Air UMC, 1645 Buford Rd, North Chesterfield, Va. Space is LIMITED. Due to construction at capitol square this year and the relocation of the General Assembly Building, space will be more LIMITED this year.

There will be a briefing on Wednesday, Jan. 31 at 7:30 p.m. at Bon Air UMC, 1645 Buford Rd.

Register by January 1 and pay \$30 early registration. After January 1, pay \$40 until January 12 when registration closes. Registration includes information packet with reusable bag, hot breakfast, box lunch (sandwich or salad), parking, transportation to the Capitol grounds, and afternoon speakers. All registration materials, maps, information on advocacy and other important documents will be sent to you by email. No refunds will be available.

Questions may be directed to the Rev. Barbara Lewis at [BarbaraLewis@vaumc.org](mailto:BarbaraLewis@vaumc.org) or (434) 594-6241. Presented by the Board of Church & Society and The United Methodist Women of the Virginia Conference. 🏡

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Local pastor Laura Vincent kisses Adison Embrey, 7, during worship at Shiloh United Methodist Church near Clinton, Ky.  
Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS





# LOCAL PASTORS

Shepherds after God's own heart



According to a multi-part series by United Methodist Communications in 2015, more and more of the denomination is leaning on part-time licensed local pastors to lead their churches. The fact is significant especially as The United Methodist Church finds itself to be a shrinking denomination in the United States.

Local pastors are not ordained, but in The United Methodist Church they are "licensed to preach and conduct divine worship and perform the duties of a pastor."

The role of any given local pastor can look very different. Robin Jones is currently serving both in a local church and in extension ministry as the chaplain and Director of the Spiritual Care Program at Jackson-Feild Behavioral Health Services (JFBHS) in Jarratt, Va. In her role at Jackson-Feild, which she has held for the past 13 years, Jones would characterize her ministry as "wonderfully frustrating."

According to the website, Jackson-Feild Behavioral Health Services "provides innovative, intensive therapeutic services using best practice trauma models for boys and girls in residential care and our community-based services."

These programs work with every young person individually, involving the family, with the goal to return the child to their community. Ages for the program vary from 12 to 21 in their Adolescent Psychiatric Residential Program and the Intensive In-Home Program.

In Jones' role, she serves in a number of functions from bringing in partnering churches in to the program to teaching Holy Yoga, a Christ-centered yoga program.

The environment of this job has been one that Jones said she has truly enjoyed and learned much from.

"It has made me so much more aware of the everyday issues that face families; families that probably are a part of local churches throughout Virginia," Jones said. "As the Director of the Spiritual Care Program, I provide a space in which kids who are struggling with mental illness can experience God in a way that is probably outside the box of many people's own understandings."



The Rev. Dr. Robin Jones celebrates eucharist in All Saints Chapel at the ECW Spring Annual Meeting hosted by Jackson-Feild May 20.

Jones shared that working with teens can be a big challenge, but she recognizes that kids want to be involved, express their spirituality and know that they matter.

"They especially want to know that there is a connection to God for themselves – regardless of where they've been in life," Jones said. "That's a pretty powerful thing to be a part of, and I am incredibly humbled living out my responsibilities with these kids."

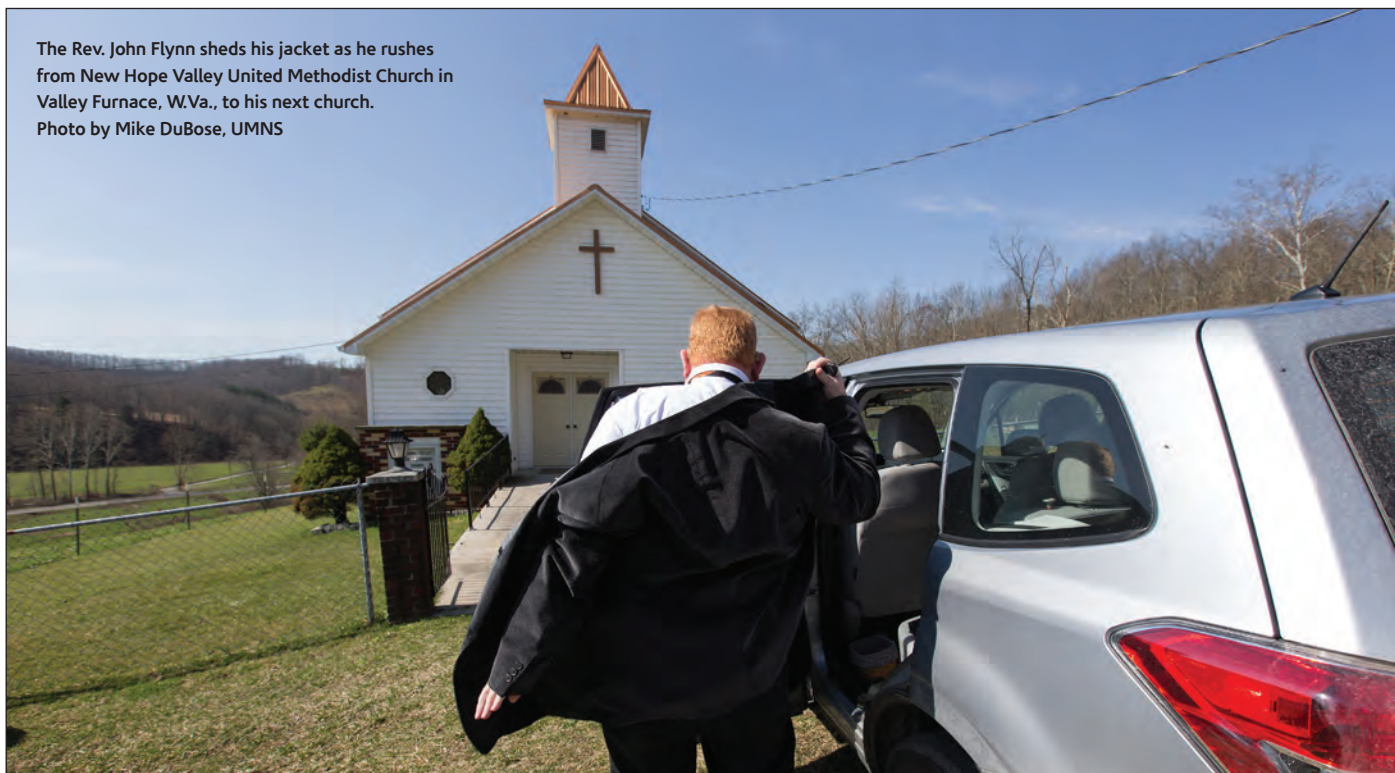
Jones shared that the Spiritual Care Program offers activities that are optional for the kids to participate in, especially she said because they should not feel bullied into a genuine relationship with God.

"That's one thing that these kids have had too much of in their lives – being told what they must believe. So, I walk the journey with them as they are comfortable. Some of my kids at JFBHS are extremely involved in the Spiritual Care Program, others less so," Jones said. "Regardless of where they are on the spectrum of knowing God, I give them opportunities to find God at their own pace."

Learn more about the ministries of licensed local pastors in the December feature.



The Rev. John Flynn sheds his jacket as he rushes from New Hope Valley United Methodist Church in Valley Furnace, W.Va., to his next church.  
Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS



## LOCAL PASTORS ON THE RISE

By Sam Hodges

**L**ocal pastors are on the rise numerically in The United Methodist Church in the United States. And though typecast as mainly leading small churches, they are landing in a range of positions and church sizes.

The upward trend with local pastors comes as ordained elders are becoming rarer.

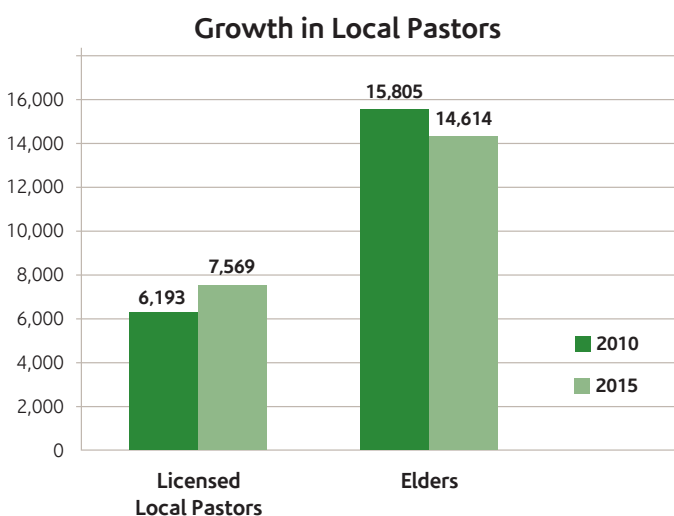
The denomination's General Council on Finance and Administration reports that from 2010 to 2015, the number of ordained elders and provisional member elders serving churches dropped from 15,806 to 14,614.

Though the denomination was shrinking in the United States, local pastors appointed to churches climbed from 6,193 to 7,569 in that time. Both full-time and part-time local pastor numbers grew, with the latter growing faster.

United Methodist elders are declining in number in the U.S., but licensed local pastors are on the increase. "Elders" above includes ordained elders and provisional member elders appointed to churches, as opposed to extension appointments. "Local pastors" includes full-time and part-time local pastors. Data source: GCFA.

The Rev. Lovett Weems, director of the Lewis Center, has long followed United Methodist clergy trends. He notes that in 1990, elders outnumbered local pastors 5 to 1. That ratio is roughly 2 to 1 now, and drops further when looking just at those in church appointments.

Conferences vary widely in clergy makeup, but the West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Oklahoma Indian Mis-







sionary and Red Bird Missionary conferences had more local pastors than elders serving churches as of summer 2015, according to GCFA. Some other conferences, such as Upper New York, East Ohio, North Alabama and Missouri, are close, and still others acknowledge they are highly dependent on this growing category of clergy.

"We'd be in a world of hurt in the Holston Conference without local pastors," said the Rev. David Graves, former superintendent of its Kingsport District.

While elder retirements are a big factor, more and more United Methodist churches can't afford the minimum salary and benefits required for an elder, said Bishop Thomas Bickerton of the Western Pennsylvania Conference.

But Bickerton and others insist local pastors often make the case for themselves by bringing skills from other careers, as well as a high level of commitment and understanding of the local culture.

The Rev. Ted Smith is superintendent of the Virginia Conference's Rappahannock River District, and monitors its statistics in membership, attendance, professions of faith, baptisms and stewardship.

"We're seeing some of our most effective, dynamic results from local pastors, hands down," Smith said. 🍀

— Excerpted from an article by Sam Hodges (United Methodist News Service) writer that can be read in its entirety here: <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/local-pastors-on-the-rise>.

This article was originally published on Sept. 25, 2015.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL TO SERVE IN THE CHURCH

By Jennifer Vestal Moore

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11*

*The Ministry of the church, therefore, is the responsibility of all baptized believers in the church. However, the ministry of the church is shaped and guided by its leaders. Paragraph 133 of The Book of Discipline reminds us that Jesus is the one who gave us our ministry.*



**A**s a baptized Christian, I am thankful that God placed a call on my heart to serve God's people in Christ's church. I am also thankful that The United Methodist Church has a distinct position within the body where my gifts, passion and joy can be used for the glory of God.

It's been nearly 10 years since I was licensed as a local pastor in the United Methodist Church. In that time, I have served in a National Hunger Ministry with the Society of St. Andrew; served with faithful servants at a two-point charge (Rock and Olive Branch) in South Brunswick; and in my current appointment as both the pastor of Bethany UMC, an incredibly busy, mission-centered congregation in Rustburg, and as the chaplain at Randolph College (Go Wildcats!) in Lynchburg. All of these ministries and the people I have encountered continue to shape me in my faith and ministry.

Being licensed instead of ordained in our church carries with it the extra work and burden of non-guaranteed appointment and a yearly interview with my District Committee on Ministry (DCOM). However, as a pastor in the local church, I have all of the same joys and responsibilities as my ordained brothers and sisters. I preside over the



Local pastor Laura Vincent and members of the Ward family arrive for worship at Shiloh United Methodist Church near Clinton, Ky. Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS

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sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism, I teach Bible Study, preach the Gospel, visit the flock and hold the hand of the sick and dying. I also get the added bonus of filling out the same charge conference reports as all appointed clergy, only without any clerical staff help or support! I currently serve on both district and conference leadership positions to which I was invited to do so by my district superintendent.

What I am most grateful for, however, is the group of United Methodist colleagues (mostly elders) who continue to surround me in prayer and are more than willing to help me more fully comprehend the complexity of our theology and Wesleyan heritage. Our discussions are always spirited conversations where all of us contribute equally pushing each other to go deeper in our faith, the Scriptures and our understanding of God.

As the daughter of a UMC elder (New York Conference) and a sought-after Christian educator, I am thankful for a connectional system that provides opportunities for all of us to serve God in the way in which God has called us to serve.

As Bishop Lewis reminds us, as Disciples of Jesus Christ we are called to be life-long learners who influence others to serve. No matter what degrees we hold or don't hold, when we are teaching and preaching God's word, we should continue to study, to learn, to grow, to read, to explore, to try to more fully understand God's call on our life so that we can help others hear the voice of God in their life.

Being a licensed local pastor has never limited me because I have kept my ears and my heart open to hearing God's purpose for my life and the opportunities God provides for me to share my gifts with others.

I'm often reminded that when one of God's beloved children is transitioning from this life to the next, and we, as their pastor, are invited into that most vulnerable space, no one is asking what degrees the pastor holds, they just want to make sure that we are willing and able to hold their hand and love them through it. 

— The Rev. Jennifer Vestal Moore is pastor at Bethany UMC in Rustburg and chaplain at Randolph College in Lynchburg.

## SERVING THE SIGNIFICANT CHURCH

By Pam Culler



Pastor Pam Culler prays over family members and their new baby.

I felt God calling me to something different in 1996. My struggle was knowing what it was. My pastor encouraged me to participate in a lay speaking workshop. "What am I going to do with lay speaking?" I asked. His response, "Preach."

I had struggled to speak in front of people my entire life, especially all through my school years. When I was in elementary school giving an oral book report made me physically ill.

Public speaking was torture until I followed my pastor's suggestion and attended a lay speaking workshop, participating once a week for six weeks.

My first class was Exegesis. My response was "Ex-a-what?" I was given a Scripture reading to exegete and it was an Old Testament Scripture. We were given had 10 minutes to speak on that Scripture, and I did it only by God's grace. Yes, indeed, I learned a lot about God's grace in my journey.

After completing my workshop and getting my certifi-





cate, I was in tears. Never in my life was I able to speak in front of a group of people and truly feel calm. After a couple of times filling in for my pastor, I still felt there was something more God was calling me to do. I was already working with the youth in our church, a part of Disciple Bible Studies, involved with the United Methodist Women and was the children's choir director.

I met with my pastor again, and this time he suggested that I go through "The Ministry Inquiry Process," and he would be my guide. I met with District Superintendent Mike Leatherwood in the Lexington District in the Western North Carolina Conference to start the process.

As I was discerning my call, I was in Disciple 4 Bible Studies. It was then I knew God was calling me to a new vocation. There were so many times where God intervened, but I could not see it. God put people in my path that would ask, "Are you a pastor?" My reply was always, "Lord, no! Why would you think that?"

## Discerning a new call

Yes, God had plans for me, but boy did I fight it.

I went to Local Pastor's School at Lake Junaluska in 1998 where I was a part of a class of 45. I was there for two weeks, then later for two weekends. I experienced God's grace time and time again and the Holy Spirit was definitely in the midst.

It was in 2000 that I began the five-year Course of Study at Duke. I remember my first summer there.

I was overwhelmed wondering, "What in the world are you thinking, Lord? I can't do this." The end of that first week I was in tears as I called my husband, Greg, and asked him to come get me.

"I can't do this. I will never be able to get through these studies!"

God bless him.

Greg's response was, "No you can't, but God has brought you to this place, and God will get you through it!"

Well, I stopped crying and, even though Greg did offer to come get me, I remained. In 2002, I was appointed to a church as an associate pastor and in 2006, I completed the five-year Course of Study.

Some colleagues went on to extended course of study or seminary and after several years became ordained as elder or deacon. For me, I felt God calling me to where I am now—a licensed local pastor. I have now served as a licensed local pastor for nearly 16 years.

## Understanding the call

I truly believe in my heart that this is where God wants me. I have had ordained colleagues and friends say to me, "If you remain a licensed local pastor, you will not be assured an appointment, and it's less money."

Well, I surely did not go into pastoral ministry for the money! I am a licensed local pastor because this is what I am called to.


Many local pastors serve small churches. A dear friend admonished, "Don't say small church—say significant church."

I love the significant church. I have been serving the same church for almost 12 years.

I believe that as a licensed local pastor you have more opportunity to build relationships with your congregation. I serve a church that has struggles. Don't all churches? My church may not be large in number. We may not have assorted ministries going on and have all the technology or booming youth and children's ministry. For me, that is okay. I serve a congregation that needs to hear God's word, to be fed, to be encouraged, to be heard, to be nurtured spiritually, mentally and physically and, most importantly, to be loved! Isn't that what all our churches need? For me, no matter what capacity we are called to and sent; we clergy are sent to shepherd God's sheep just as Christ did.

Good things, even great things can come out of those "significant" churches! I love the small congregation churches. I have heard some pastors say they do not like serving the "smaller churches." Everything isn't wrapped in a tidy package. We are all called to serve. Some of us serve in a different capacity.

As a licensed local pastor I have, at times, been made to feel that I was "out in left field." One of my dearest friends is an ordained elder. I support her and stood up for her when she was ordained. She, in turn, has supported me in my ministry setting and we share our concerns and joys of our chosen vocations. I may not have the seminary degree or been ordained but I have been called and sent as well.

God continues to use me and has blessed me in this call as local pastor. I welcome all to table and minister to the hurting. I love the unlovable and pray continually for God's will to be done in our churches and in the Virginia Conference. I love and feel very blessed that I too serve as clergy in this conference. Thanks be to God! 

— The Rev. Pam Culler is pastor at Sherbourne United Methodist Church, Richmond District.



## FRONT ROYAL CHURCH OFFERS FLEXIBLE WORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES TO STUDENTS

By Celeste Brooks



Pastor John Stelzl

In the short 16 months in which John Stelzl has been serving at John Wesley United Methodist Church (JWUMC) in Front Royal, Va., he has helped breathe new life into the congregation by welcoming in teenagers from Randolph-Macon Academy (R-MA), a college-prep boarding school in Front Royal.

As a UMC-affiliated school, R-MA has its own chaplain, Joshua Orndorff, who has been busy building campus programs such as two weekly Bible studies and confirmation classes. Last spring, Orndorff noticed that five of the students receiving confirmation planned to join JWUMC, a small, historically African American congregation in town.

"John Stelzl has done amazing work in reaching out to our students at Randolph-Macon Academy," said Orndorff. "The connection has continued this year, and it has brought excitement to their congregation and provided a church home for many of our students, including our international Nigerian students."

Stelzl was first assigned to JWUMC as a lay minister on July 1, 2016. He became a licensed local pastor at this past year's Virginia Annual Conference and was appointed to serve as a quarter-time pastor starting on July 1, 2017.

When he was still a lay minister, Stelzl worked under the direction of the Rev. Alan Combs, as part of a Cooperative Parish (Front Royal-John Wesley Extended Cooperative Parish).

Combs and Orndorff, who had joined up to provide a confirmation class for the teenagers of Front Royal UMC and R-MA, brought their confirmands to visit various churches to learn about different styles of worship. This seemingly simple idea led to more than any of the three could have imagined.

As a lay minister, Stelzl was not able to offer Communion, so he and Combs swapped pulpits one Sunday. That happened to be the week a number of R-MA students visited JWUMC.

"The response of the JW congregation was wonderful," said Stelzl. "It was like a new life had breathed into the members. They started talking about how they could offer rides to students who needed it so that they could attend worship on Sunday mornings. The members were excited to see new faces and hear young voices singing."

Stelzl quickly recognized an opportunity that would benefit both John Wesley UMC and Randolph-Macon Academy. "Since R-MA is affiliated with The UMC it only makes sense for us to offer the students a church to call home. We want John Wesley to be a place where they can feel welcome like a part of the family," he said. "John Wesley is





a small membership church and this has allowed me to be flexible in offering worship opportunities to the students. Last spring, several of the students led the entire congregation in Sunday morning worship, with Chaplain Orndoff preaching the Word.”

Even the distance of the summer break did not deter the members of JWUMC from caring for their newest teen members.

“During summer vacation, a letter was sent to those students who had joined our congregation, letting them know that the church was thinking about them, and praying for them, and that we looked forward to seeing them once classes started up again,” Stelzl explained. “When the students joined us for Sunday morning worship again this fall, they were given the invitation to participate as liturgists, or as musicians or in any way that they would like to share their talents as part of the morning worship service. All of the students were invited to join us for our recent movie night and to join us for Men’s and Women’s Day, which we celebrated with a live praise band (Witness) and a guest speaker from NASA (Cynthia Simmons).”

“The Spirit of the Lord is a strong and palpable presence when you walk into the doors of this church,” Stelzl commented. “You hear it in the music. You sense it in the warmth of the welcoming hugs and handshakes of the members. You feel it in the strength and passion of the testimonies and prayers. As we strive to become a more missional/out reaching church we want to share God’s Spirit with those beyond our small sanctuary. We are doing this through ongoing missions like feeding the hungry, care trees, open mic hymn sings, public interactions through social media as well as special events that the public are invited to attend. The presence of the R-MA students and those who have recently joined have reignited the fire within this church to fulfill the Great Commission, given to us by Jesus.....Go and make disciples!” 🐏

– Celeste Brooks is Director of Communications at Randolph-Macon Academy.



## ALWAYS LEARNING: A PASTOR’S JOURNEY🐏

By Glenn Riggs

In 2009, a woman asked me, “Pastor, could you pray for me?”

At that time, I was starting to fill in as a lay speaker within my district, but this one caught me off guard. My immediate reaction was, “I am not a pastor, but I can certainly pray for you.”

My desire to learn more deepened, and I had a conversation with my wife. What if that woman saw something, something neither of us expected? What if I was being called to pastor?

I continued taking lay servant classes for a few years and teaching. I was settled into a career as an operations manager of an IT company. Having spent 15 years in the sports and events business, I had seen a lot and experienced many ups and downs of life, but I was still seeking more. Something was finally answered that day as I realized that God meets us where we are and calls us into more. That is the action that I try to bring to my ministry. God takes what we think as a broken or splintered life and shows us that our stories can help others through difficult times.

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## Answering the call

At the age of 39, I decided to answer the call. I was motivated by a good friend, an elder in the Virginia Annual Conference, who taught me in Lay Servant classes. He treated me with love and compassion and never looked down at me.

Growing up, I struggled with that. I felt many preachers preached over my head, driving me away from the church. I loved what the Bible said. I was very intrigued by it, but to ask a question and get an answer back that I could barely understand pushed me away. I decided going into ministry that I could use some of my talents to hopefully help people understand. I was responsible for teaching seniors to use the Internet and email, certainly I could try to proclaim the Gospel in a way that people could understand without talking over their head.

## Misconceptions about Licensed Local Pastors

Some of the biggest misconceptions as a licensed local pastor include:

1) I am undereducated. We never stop learning and there are many tools at our fingertips to help us grow. We are, as Bishop Lewis has said, lifelong learners. I never want to stop. I possess a Bachelor's Degree in accounting and 20 years of management experience. I am currently enrolled in Course of Study at Duke University and I love it (It fits my ministry.) I was raised in the church, walked away from church and came back to church. I have lived many of the excuses that I hear for not coming to church. I saw Jesus meet me where I was so I try to meet people where they are.

2) It is hard to explain what it means to be a licensed local pastor and not being ordained to a lot of people.

## Finding the people

Starting my ministry, I wanted to meet people where they are and I decided that sitting in an office was not the place to do it. Once I became a certified candidate, I was assigned to a small part-time church prior to licensing. I found that people were not visiting the church, so I had to find them.

I did so by walking and jogging in the neighborhood which became a vital part of my ministry. I got a bright neon yellow shirt that said "Pastor" on it. Yes, it seemed hokey, but the first time that I ran past a bus stop and a

gentleman said, "Good morning, pastor"—it was worth it.

I found myself praying with people on the street and some of the people that came to the food pantry of the church started recognizing me. Slowly, we had a couple visitors. A new couple came to the church and a few weeks later said they were opening a restaurant down the street from us and wanted me to come and say a prayer for them and the building.

Shortly after, I received a call from the district superintendent saying he thought he had a church that was a great fit. The catch was I had to leave the church I was serving and had to walk away from my job with the IT Company. It was a full-time appointment. I knew in my heart God was calling me and a quick call to my wife changed my life.

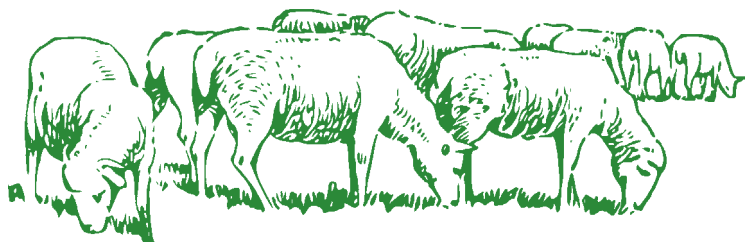
## Change in ministry setting

Ministry in the full-time setting was much different, but yet was the same. By being visible I quickly became known by most of the community. I like to sit in the local restaurants and have coffee and work on my sermons. I quickly became known as the marathon running, Pokémon playing, domino playing, and hang out at the local restaurant preacher.

I am inspired by others stories, and I hope I inspire people to follow Jesus. Bishop Lewis shared in a message that we need to take Jesus to the streets. The next week I took a wireless microphone, walked out of the sanctuary and stood in the street and delivered my sermon from there. The cars that drove past looked at me strange, but they did at least wave. I truly keep my congregation guessing of what will come next.

We are looking at ways to reach more of the unchurched in our community. With conference resources, support from our district offices and support of our fellow clergy, we can take a few minutes and listen to God. God is calling us to change this world, I just hope and pray that I can continue to answer the call. 🍷

— The Rev. Glenn Riggs is a licensed local pastors at Wakefield UMC in Franklin, Va.







# PASTOR SHARES STORY OF A SPECIAL BAPTISM

By Gerry Burkholder

*"If you or your child have never been baptized and you would like to be baptized, or you would like for your child to be baptized, see Pastor Gerry."*

The response to this bulletin announcement came from a very special family. The father was in the final stages of cancer and his adult special needs daughter had never been baptized. Mary\* was confined to a wheelchair and had never developed speech. Because of the loving devotion of her parents, she had lived years beyond medical expectations. While she could not speak, she could hear. What Mary truly understood often remained a mystery. When I sat and watched her interact with her family, looking into her eyes, I always felt there was a level of understanding we just never found a way to reach.

Her father was too ill to leave the house, so her mother asked if I could possibly come to the house for a baptism. Mary had never been baptized.

The church and Mary's family embraced her baptism with such a commitment of love and desire to make this a special day of true celebration. When I arrived, there was food preparation going on in the kitchen for a true family feast. Extended family of other faith traditions had come to join in this special day. Church leadership was there. At least one elderly lady who had not been well enough to attend services was simply not going to be denied being a part of this most special day. I had not expected so many people or such excitement.

My heart was strangely warmed to witness Christ everywhere I looked. The Spirit was there among us! Mary's father, who was so frail, seemed to be years younger, and I even detected a slight spring in his step. Mary's mother with her gentle manner and nurturing, caring nature was so appreciative as she kept a watchful eye on her husband and Mary.

Before we began the baptism, I indicated I wanted to quietly talk just with Mary. Sitting beside her I explained what we were going to be doing and why. I showed her the water and the seashell. I told her I would put water in

the shell and pour it on her head. I told her it was called baptism and wanted to make sure Mary heard how much God loved her and that with the pouring of the water on her head we were telling everybody about God's love for her, that she was a child of God. And then I told her we would eat and celebrate God's love!

At the point when I poured the water on Mary's head, there was a slight almost moan. I was not sure anyone else heard it. And I was afraid this joyous expression of God's love perhaps frightened or in some way caused her distress.

Afterwards Mary's mother hugged and thanked me. She told me how much my coming and baptizing Mary meant to her and her family. She added, they knew Mary did not understand, but they did and they were so appreciative. I think I commented that Mary might understand more than we know. As I left, and for several days, I kept hearing the sound I thought was distress from Mary.

When I arrived for worship on the following Sunday, one of the women asked me if I had heard about Mary. My anxiety level grew a bit as I answered I had not.

She excitedly continued explaining how later that day, all had grown quiet in the house and Mary's parents wondered where Mary was. My parishioner added that Mary was found in the bathroom by the sink with the water running, holding the shell in her hand. In her lap were all her baby dolls and she was baptizing them one after the other.

First, I laughed a joyous laugh.  
It seemed to me Mary did  
understand and wanted those she  
loved to be baptized too! How  
awesome!

First, I laughed a joyous laugh. It seemed to me Mary did understand and wanted those she loved to be baptized too! How awesome!

The presence of the Spirit that day was acknowledged by a moan, not of fear or discomfort, but understanding beyond human words. Remembering still brings chills down my back, tears to my eyes, and a humbleness for which I have no words. 🍷

— Gerry Reed Burkholder is a retired licensed local pastor.

# LIVING THE WORD\*



*The Rev. Katherine A. Malloy is a provisional deacon, commissioned at Annual Conference in June 2017. Her primary appointment is serving as the executive assistant to the Dean and President at Virginia Theological Seminary. Malloy's secondary appointment is at Floris UMC in Herndon.*

**Dec. 3, 2017**

**1 Corinthians 15-16**

**Key Verses: 16:13-24**

**Who refreshes your soul?**

Who refreshes your soul? Whose soul do you refresh? Recently, I had the opportunity to spend a weekend at a friend's lakehouse with a group of old friends. We had not gotten together all at once in about three years. At the lakehouse there was no television, no Internet, there was even a cell phone box should we wish to use it (some did). We spent two days catching up, playing games, working through two 1,000-piece puzzles and resting. It was absolutely lovely. My spirit felt refreshed after the weekend away with these dear ones. I had been weary, even more so than I realized. Spending time in the company of these beloved people of faith, engaging in conversation with them, giving thanks to God for them and their gifts and learning from their life experiences gave me a renewed sense of hope in our ability to be the church.

We cannot deny that these are uncertain times; in our world, in the denomination, perhaps in our own hearts. Fear is rampant. The communication and access to information we enjoy today is both a gift and a curse; we are immediately aware of all things happening in all places if we choose, which can compound the fear, the scarcity mindset and hurtful words and actions.

The Apostle Paul could not have foreseen the circumstances in which we find ourselves. He did know that life in community is messy, can wear us out and we can easily stray from the way of the beloved community. His final instructions to the Corinthian community resonate today: "Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love."<sup>1</sup> We can and should acknowledge the uncertainty. Sticking our heads in the sand is not helpful. As we light the candle of hope, however, I pray that we might experience a renewed sense of hope for one another, for the church, and for the coming of God's kingdom on earth. "May the light

<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:13-14.

sent from God shine in the darkness to show us the way of salvation."<sup>2</sup>

**Dec. 10, 2017**

**Ephesians 4-6**

**Key verses: 4:14-5:2**

**Part of the body**

"It's what really cool rock stars do." Those simple words and others like them were enough to convince me to do a myriad of things as a tween and preteen. As the youngest of three children who was always eager to please, it did not take much to get me to do things including putting deodorant in my "kneepits" (the back of my legs behind the knee) and a myriad of other things. My siblings did have quite a bit of fun at my expense but it was mostly harmless; although their substitution of glue for my lotion did turn out to be a sticky mess after they convinced me it was my imagination and nothing was amiss with the "lotion."

Today, we light the second candle in our Advent wreaths, "as a symbol of Christ the Way. May the Word sent from God through the prophets lead us to the way of salvation."<sup>3</sup> Christ comes to us and shows us the way of salvation. We enjoy the wisdom and guidance provided by prophets like Isaiah and John the Baptist, pointing toward the way. Likewise, the Apostle Paul tells his readers to "grow up,"<sup>4</sup> pointing us back toward Christ the Way when we have strayed. It is easy to get caught up in the ways of this world; insensitivity, greediness, immorality, bitterness and malice abound. "That is not the way you learned Christ!"<sup>5</sup> Paul reminds readers of our place as part of the body; connected to one another and when each part is working properly, "the body's growth is promoted, building itself up in love."<sup>6</sup> He begs us, "lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bear

<sup>2</sup> *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 264.

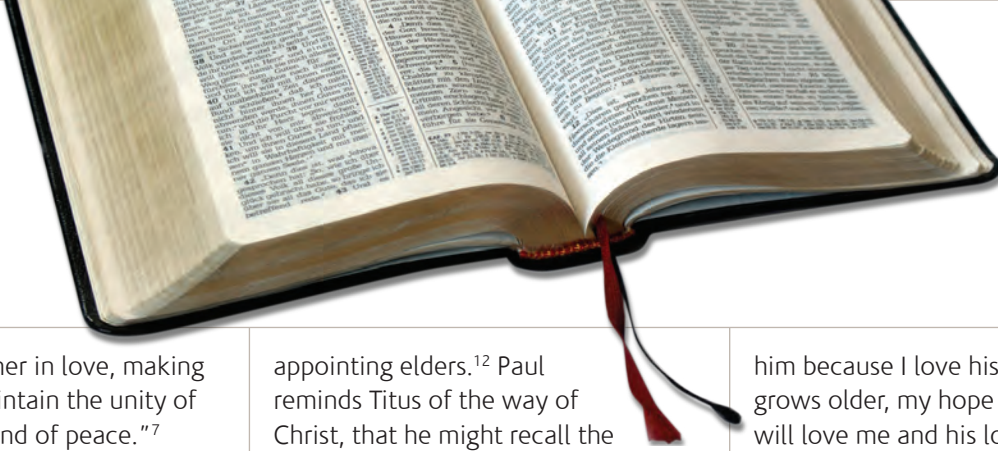
<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Paraphrasing Ephesians 4:14-15.

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 4:20.

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 4:16.





ing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”<sup>7</sup>

With age and wisdom, I have matured. I am not as easily “tossed to and fro” as I once was.<sup>8</sup> May we, the church, also continue to grow in our faith, wisdom, grace, and love of one another; for this is Christ the Way.

## Dec. 17, 2017

### Titus-Philemon

**Key verses: Titus 3:1-8; Philemon 4-7**  
**The thing about joy**

**I**n this third week of Advent, we light a candle to symbolize Christ our Joy. “May the joyful promise of your presence, O God, make us rejoice in our hope of salvation.”<sup>9</sup> C.S. Lewis’ explanation of Joy in his book, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, seems particularly poignant in light of the readings for this week. I was taught that joy is a certain contentment that goes beyond mere temporal happiness. Lewis notes the quality of Joy that it is “...an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction.”<sup>10</sup> He writes, “All Joy reminds. It is never a possession, always a desire for something longer ago or further away or still ‘about to be.’”<sup>11</sup>

The letter to Titus, I might say, is meant help restore joy in one who needs a pick-me-up. Titus knows what to do; he’s been at this work for a for a while if he has been tasked with putting things in order in Crete and

appointing elders.<sup>12</sup> Paul reminds Titus of the way of Christ, that he might recall the joy he has previously experienced in his task, by appealing to his joy in Christ.

Paul skillfully moves Philemon toward freeing Onesimus. He appeals to Philemon’s joy in Christ, noting how he, Paul, has received joy and encouragement from Philemon’s love.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps Paul’s confidence that Philemon will follow his instructions is rooted at least in part in Paul’s own insatiable desire for Christ our joy.

The weird thing about joy, though, is that we do not experience it when joy is that which we desire. A word to the wise: Lewis discloses of his own aggressive search for joy, “...often I frightened it away by my greedy impatience to snare it, and, even when it came, instantly destroyed it by introspection...”<sup>14</sup> I pray that we might experience “the joyful promise of God’s presence” in this holy season of preparation.<sup>15</sup>

## Dec. 24, 2017

### 1 John 1-5

**Key verses: 4:7-5:5**  
**The privilege of love**

**I**n August, my brother and sister-in-law welcomed their first child. Michael James was beloved by many even before he made his August debut. Almost everyone I know has seen multiple pictures of this little fellow. I love this child not because of anything he has done or love he has shown toward me. Rather, I love

him because I love his parents. As he grows older, my hope is that Michael will love me and his love for me will be informed by the relationship between his parents and me; one of love.

On this fourth Sunday in Advent we celebrate the visitation prior to the birth of our Lord, Jesus. In this we should also be reminded of our privilege to love God and to love the children of God; a privilege afforded to us from God through the Holy Spirit. Love of God and of one another are wrapped up in each other and in the reception of the Spirit. “Those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.”<sup>16</sup> And “...if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.”<sup>17</sup>

We light the fourth candle “as a symbol of the Prince of Peace. May the visitation of your Holy Spirit, O God, make us ready for the coming of Jesus, our hope and joy.”<sup>18</sup> Let us love you by loving one another and let your Spirit descend upon us.

## Dec. 31, 2017

### Revelation 20-22

**Key Verses: 21:1-8**  
**New Jerusalem**

**T**hroughout the season of Advent, we have been preparing ourselves to receive Christ, our Lord. We have celebrated Christ our Hope,

<sup>16</sup> 1 John 4:21b.

<sup>17</sup> John 4:12b.

<sup>18</sup> *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 264.

(Con’t. on next page: “LIVING WORD.”)

<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 4:1b-3.

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 4:14.

<sup>9</sup> *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 264.

<sup>10</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, Kindle edition, Loc 448 of 3269.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc 1175 of 3269.

<sup>12</sup> Titus 1:5.

<sup>13</sup> Philemon 1:7.

<sup>14</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, Kindle edition, Loc 2304 of 3269.

<sup>15</sup> *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 264.

**\*Abingdon Press announced that they are discontinuing the publication of the New International Lesson Series Annual. These passages are in accordance with Bishop Lewis’ Bible Reading Challenge calendar. See December calendar on pg. 27.**

# CLERGY & DIACONAL



## DEATHS



**The Rev. Julian "Marty" Martin Jr.**, a retired elder, died Oct. 27, 2017. He served Bethel (Fauquier) from 2003 until he retired

in 2016. A Celebration of Life service took place Nov. 3 at Wilderness United Methodist Community Church in Spotsylvania.



**The Rev. Herbert K. Seemann** died Oct. 9, 2017. He was a resident of Bridgewater, Va., at the time of passing. Serving his country in

the United States Air Force, he began his service in the Virginia Conference in 1978 at Greenbackville. He went on to serve Potomac in the former Ashland District, Saint Andrew's in the Alexandria District, Mount Pleasant in the former Norfolk District, Bethel-Saint Matthews in the former Rappahannock District, Mount Pisgah in the Harrisonburg District, Noland Memorial in the former Peninsula District, Franklin in the Danville District, Macedonia-Montague Avenue, Glover Memorial in the Staunton District, and Huntington Court in the Roanoke District. He retired in 2010.

**Marie Peters**, mother to **Diane Hargraves** and mother-in-law to **the Rev. Dr. Stan Hargraves**, died Oct. 18,

2017. A Celebration of Life took place at Chester UMC in Chester on Oct. 26.

**Nellie Mae "Nell" Coffey Sallinger**, 80, of Amherst, died Oct. 20, 2017, at Lynchburg General Hospital. She was the loving wife of Murray "Sal" Sallinger for 56 years. Sal is a retired local pastor in the Virginia Conference. Born on July 21, 1937 in Lynchburg, she was the daughter of the late Henry Thomas Coffey and Thelma May Bowling Coffey. Nell retired from AT&T, was a member of the Eastern Star in Norfolk and was a member of Mt. Pleasant UMC. She enjoyed reading and doing word puzzles but she loved to shop. Nell also enjoyed going to the lake and her home in the mountains. In addition to her husband, Sal, she is survived by five nieces, Cindy McKinney (Johnnie); Regina Scott (Marty), Deborah Allen (Sidney); Tammy Aveille (Michael); and Joy Strickfaden (Kirk); four great-nieces; four great-nephews; two great-great-nephews; two great-great-nieces; and a sister-in-law, Carolyn Brooks.

**Victoria White**, long-time secretary at Lakeside UMC, Richmond, died suddenly Oct. 9, 2017. She was the mother of **the Rev. Christian S. White Jr.**, deacon in full connection, who is the Minister of Congregational Family Life, Fairlington UMC, Alexandria District.

**Anne C. Tinney**, surviving spouse of **the Rev. James Tinney**, died Sept. 18, 2017. She was a resident of Urbanna, Virginia at the time of passing. Funeral services were held Sept. 28 in the Urbanna UMC in Urbanna.

**James Marshall Wright**, 89, of Moss Run, died Sept. 26, 2017. Wright was a veteran of the United States Army

having served during the Korean War. He was a faithful member of Grace Brethren Church. He was married to the late Bessie Campbell Wright for 62 years until her passing in 2011. Wright is survived by three children, **the Rev. J. Lynn Wright** (Michele); Cathy W. Kruse (Steve); and Kevin E. Wright (Tammy). He rejoiced in the lives of four grandchildren, D. Jarret Wright (Ashley); Sandi Kruse Fulp and Justin LeBlanc, Tiffany K. Turner (Cory), and Michael Kruse (Jackie). Also left to cherish the memory of their "Pops" are 12 great-grandchildren. 🍷

*("REFORMATION," cont. from page 9.)*

edly decided to change his name and that of his young son to that of the reformer's. The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. went on to champion freedom and justice in his own way.

For United Methodists, Luther's most direct impact may be his staunch defense of the freedom Christians have through Christ's justification by faith.

Hearing Luther's preface to Romans helped spur Wesley's spiritual renewal on the night of May 24, 1738.

"About a quarter before nine, while the leader was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed," Wesley wrote in his diary. "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation ...."

With his heart warmed, Wesley went on to found the movement United Methodists know today. And it likely would not have happened without the Reformation. 🍷

— Heather Hahn is a multimedia news reporter for United Methodist News Service (UMNS). Contact her at (615) 742-5470 or [newsdesk@umcom.org](mailto:newsdesk@umcom.org). This article was first published on Oct. 23.

The Advocate strives to compile and share obituaries in this section through ClergyNet and LaityNet and as the office receives them. To make sure our staff publishes an obituary, please email to [MadelinePillow@vaumc.org](mailto:MadelinePillow@vaumc.org) or mail to c/o Communications Office, P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058-5606.



("LIVING WORD," cont. from page 23.)

whose light shines in the darkness to show us the way of salvation. The candle that symbolizes Christ the Way, who is the Word of God sent through the prophets to lead us to the way of salvation, has been lit. Through Christ our joy we have enjoyed the promise of God's presence and rejoiced in our hope of salvation. We have prayed for the visitation of the Holy Spirit, that we might be made ready for the arrival of Jesus, who is our very hope and joy. And now we rejoice in Emmanuel, God with us, who is the King of Kings and Prince of Peace!

Every time I read Revelation 21, I get butterflies in my stomach. I pray that we might all experience a stirring deep within that points to the hope for our salvation. May the assurance of God's faithfulness settle upon you like a warm blanket and that you would know that God incarnate not only provides others to point the way to salvation, but Godself indeed dwells among us.<sup>19</sup> Let us allow the disquieting joy of Christ, which refuses to be satiated by any earthly thing to enter into us.

May we anticipate the coming of Jesus, who is our hope and joy, through the visitation of your Holy Spirit. Open us, God, to receive your Spirit upon us, as we live into our heritage as children of the Most High God, who love one another.<sup>20</sup> Amen. ☞

<sup>19</sup> Revelation 21:3.

<sup>20</sup> Revelation 21:7.

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# FROM THE BISHOP



## Prayer as a means of grace

*Dear Virginia Annual Conference,*

**J**ohn Wesley, founder of Methodism, stated that prayer is “the grand means of drawing near to God.”

I believe that prayer is one of the most underutilized disciplines that we practice individually and in our churches. Prayer is a powerful tool and has an element of mystery.

What do you think would happen if our priorities shifted and instead of having a monthly church meeting or

choir rehearsal, we surrendered our own agendas and prayed for the body of Christ? I believe to really understand the power of prayer, one must pray!

In The United Methodist Church, prayer is categorized as a “means of grace.” Wesley believed that means of grace are ways God works invisibly in disciples, hastening, strengthening and confirming faith so that God’s grace pervades in and through disciples.

Why is prayer important? Prayer is simply the avenue for daily communication with God. Prayer is so important to the life of a Christian that it is mentioned over 250 times in Scripture. Martin Luther King Jr. stated, “to be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”

Praying can be quite intimidating because we think we must have flowery or eloquent words to communicate with God. There are many types of prayer: centering, intercessory, contemplative, flash, breath, petitionary, morning, midday, evening and Tongsung Kido prayer that maybe utilized in our daily practice.

Prayer has always been a favorite discipline that I practice diligently. After seeing the movie *War Room* in 2015, I created a room in my house that resembles the room in Mrs. Clara’s house. An intimate place where I can pray, “war” and intercede for my family, friends, clergy, laity, conference staff of the Virginia Conference, The United Methodist Church

and anything that God may place on my heart.

Bishop Cho created a culture of prayer in the Virginia Annual Conference during his episcopacy. In 2015, he reset a goal for at least 50 percent of the clergy of the Virginia Annual Conference to engage in spiritual disciplines for “one hour” daily and for 50 percent of Virginia Annual Conferences churches to become prayer covenant churches. I challenge you to continue to be faithful to the disciplines that were taught and engaged throughout this annual conference.

As we continue to live into our new vision “to be disciples of Jesus Christ who are lifelong learners who influence others to serve,” there will be a spiritual formation of prayer that will undergird the implementation of this vision. Please be on the lookout for me to share how we will reengage the annual conference on the topic of prayer. Also, mark your calendar for Saturday, September 15, 2018 for the Bishop’s Convocation on Prayer. Our guest plenary speaker will be the Rev. Dr. Terry Teykl, author of *Pray the Price*. Location of this event has not been determined.

*Peace and Blessings,*

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis



# ONE LAST WORD

## Bishop's Bible Challenge readings for December

December 1	1 Corinthians 9-11
December 2	1 Corinthians 12-14
December 3	1 Corinthians 15-16
December 4	2 Corinthians 1-4
December 5	2 Corinthians 5-9
December 6	2 Corinthians 10-13
December 7	Galatians 1-3
December 8	Galatians 4-6
December 9	Ephesians 1-3
December 10	Ephesians 4-6
December 11	Philippians 1-4
December 12	Colossians 1-4
December 13	1 Thessalonians 1-5
December 14	2 Thessalonians 1-3
December 15	1 Timothy 1-6
December 16	2 Timothy 1-4
December 17	Titus-Philemon
December 18	Hebrews 1-6
December 19	Hebrews 7-10
December 20	Hebrews 11-13
December 21	James 1-5
December 22	1 Peter 1-5
December 23	2 Peter 1-3
December 24	1 John 1-5
December 25	2 John-Jude
December 26	Revelation 1-3
December 27	Revelation 4-8
December 28	Revelation 9-12
December 29	Revelation 13-16
December 30	Revelation 17-19
December 31	Revelation 20-22

— 2018 Bible Challenge dates will be forthcoming. Visit [www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org) for up-to-date information.

THEN JESUS TOLD THEM THIS PARABLE:  
SUPPOSE ONE OF YOU HAS A HUNDRED  
SHEEP AND LOSES ONE OF THEM.  
DOESN'T HE LEAVE THE NINETY-NINE IN  
THE OPEN COUNTRY AND GO AFTER THE  
LOST SHEEP UNTIL HE FINDS IT? AND  
WHEN HE FINDS IT, HE JOYFULLY PUTS IT  
ON HIS SHOULDERS AND GOES HOME.  
THEN HE CALLS HIS FRIENDS AND  
NEIGHBORS TOGETHER AND SAYS,  
**REJOICE WITH ME:**  
I HAVE FOUND MY LOST SHEEP. LUKE 15:3-6



# "I don't want to be another statistic."

— MARK, FOSTER CARE YOUTH

THE NATIONAL STATISTICS FOR  
YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE ARE GRIM:

50%

don't complete  
high school by age 18

91%

don't graduate  
from college

MARK WAS SLATED to become one of those statistics. With the imprisonment of his father and the death of his mother, he had a rough childhood. He entered foster care at age nine and was shuffled between several foster homes and a residential facility. He was struggling and falling behind in school.

Then in 2014, Mark entered the UMFS Treatment Foster Care program. UMFS matched Mark with a loving foster family, and provided the entire family with unwavering support. As a result, Mark was able to catch up in school and graduate with honors. This fall, Mark became the first person in his family to attend college.

There are 5,330 children like Mark in foster care in Virginia. Don't let them become statistics. Help us provide the support they need to succeed in life.

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