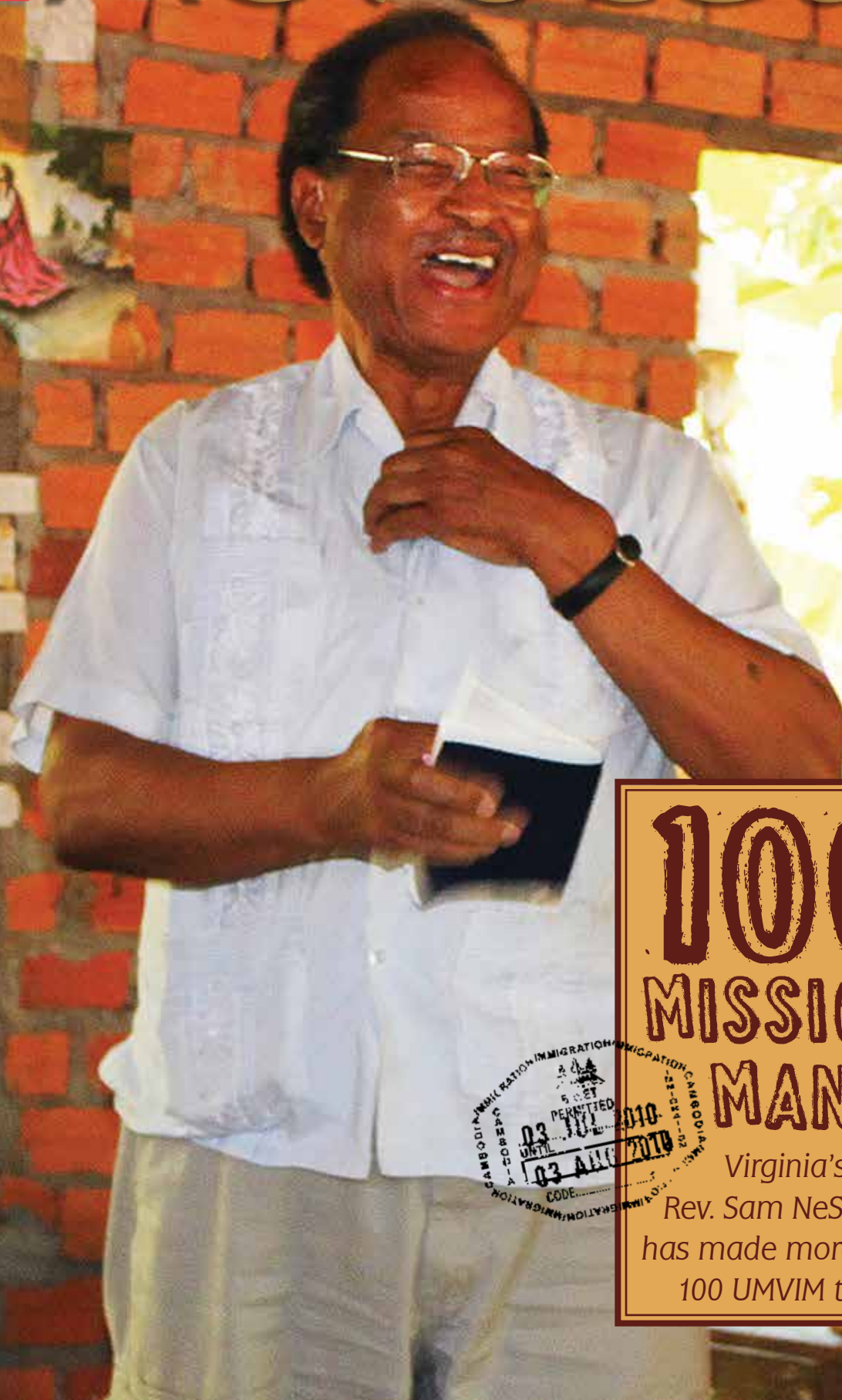


Advocate



100 MISSION MAN

Virginia's
Rev. Sam NeSmith
has made more than
100 UMVIM trips



Connecting with the



Virginia Advocate

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

FROM THE EDITOR



Neill Caldwell
Editor

Dear Sam,
I apologize.

You know that old saying about asking forgiveness is better than asking permission? Well this issue of the *Advocate* is a good example. Although to be totally transparent, I did ask permission and was turned down. So I decided to do it anyway.

I did ask the Rev. Sam NeSmith if we could put his photo on the cover and celebrate his 100th mission team trip. Several times. He said no each time. He didn't want attention directed to him because it's not about the individual, it's about the team. It's about the mission.

I get that. It is about the mission. But this is too good a story, too amazing a marker. One hundred mission trips? I've been on one and it pretty much wore me out.

(Actually I think by now he's up to 102 mission trips... he's in Cambodia right now, as I write this, leading another United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) team. The man certainly does not let grass grow under his feet...)

I asked around to see if someone had heard of anyone doing that many mission trips. Most people laughed.

The one official UMVIM mission trip I went on was in January 2013 to Cambodia, and Rev. NeSmith was one of my travel companions. The trip would have been a lot less entertaining if Sam had not been present. His singing, his stories, his over-the-top laugh and his harmonica-playing make the miles on dusty, third world back-roads go by easier.

He visited Africa multiple times in the 1980s. For a while Russia was Sam's focus, and he went there more than two dozen times, most often to help the Pyatigorsk School of the Mentally Handicapped. Then he looked to Haiti, especially after its devastating earthquake five years ago. Now there's Cambodia, and trips down to Haiti, and regularly leading work teams to Tangier Island much closer to home.

So I won't mention that he was Harrisonburg District Superintendent from 1978-1984, or that he's a fellow Tar Heel native. I won't even mention what an amazing wood carver he is. Or the fact that he makes the best peanut brittle on the planet (quite possibly the universe, but not all the data is in yet).

Because it's all about the mission. It's about following Christ's instruction to "GO" into the world, making disciples, visiting places that you've only read about in books, creating relationships, sampling the food, participating in worship, constantly taking cute kids' pictures with your iPad (all of which Rev. NeSmith does very well, mind you). It's about getting your hands dirty and your clothes dirty, group meals and dealing with less-than-American-standard bathroom facilities.

The UMVIM program started as a grassroots movement to connect United Methodist volunteers with opportunities to help other people. It also provides a vehicle for sustainable development efforts. Along with our amazing disaster response arm, it's one of the key reasons I'm proud to be a United Methodist.

Now... where's my harmonica? 🎵



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

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

Fax: 804-521-1174

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

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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.

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On the cover: The Rev. Sam NeSmith speaks at the Methodist church in Ta Lom, Cambodia in 2013. Photo by Neill Caldwell. Above, a UMVIM team helps with a building project in Haiti.

The *Virginia Advocate* Staff

Linda S. Rhodes | Virginia Conference Director of Communications
Neill M. Caldwell | Editor
Cathryn Huff | Graphic Designer
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LETTERS

Do we need a new mission statement?

Karl Barth said that the mission of the church should be the activity of God.

One of our bishops in the Virginia Conference said that the only difference between a church person and a non-church person is that you name it. It seems to me if the church were to take the wisdom from these two and put them together, our mission and purpose would not be "Go and make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." Instead, the mission and purpose of The United Methodist Church would be to name the activities of God in the church and in the world. Since we don't worship a passive God, someone could give a testimony at every worship service where he or she sees God at work in the church or in the world. Of course, this may include the acts of God through our present mission statement, but making disciples of Jesus is not the only thing God does.

It seems to me if we don't change our present mission statement we are trying to put God in a box. My biggest concern is that after talking to

more than 40 millennials there is not one who would know how to go about making a disciple. In other words, they would not be able to participate in the church's mission statement, but it is very possible they would give a testimony of where they see God at work.

-Pete Costello

Free Advent resource

Here at the Hermitage in Roanoke, through these past nine years, I've volunteered to provide grace at meals in the dining room. Prayers have been printed in the menu folder.

For the season of Advent through Jan. 3, Dr. Hunter Mabry volunteered to provide thoughts and prayers. The Sundays were given special emphasis on the front, while on the back side of the half-sheet each day of the week carried the theme leading to Christmas.

Dr. Mabry's treatment of the Advent season and New Year's is comprehensive and so well done, it seems to me that other pastors might like copies for their Advent file. With his permission I will provide the material. Just send me a self-addressed, postage-paid envelope and I will send the material at no cost.

The return envelope (with stamp!) is all that's needed.

-The Rev. C. Warner Crumb
1009 Old Country Club Road
Roanoke, VA 24017

Holy Conversation.2?

I am a subscriber to the *Advocate* and was glad to know about the Day of Holy Conversation, and I read through the articles.

At the same time, a few nights ago, on the PBS NewsHour, there was a story about a young teenage transgender girl who committed suicide because she had been so bullied and banned from a social life at her school.

By comparison, the Holy Conversation was pablum – blah blah blah about how Methodists are going to get along with each other on this issue – not too much new here. It said nothing about the effect on real LGBT persons. Or maybe I missed something.

I think that continually highlighting the disagreement among United Methodists without proposing solutions about how to treat LGBT persons provides ammunition to the LGBT haters who have and continue to physically and mentally abuse these human beings. I am not LGBT, but am disappointed that the Virginia Conference's Holy Conversation seemed to do little to advance social justice for those who are. Maybe a Holy Conversation.2?

-Susie Bachtel,
Clarendon UMC, Arlington

Harmony revival

One recent bitter cold afternoon I received a call from a good friend with



LETTERS

the news that his niece had had a bad fall while traveling through this area of Virginia and was in a local hospital. Due to unusual circumstances, no family members could be with her, and he asked if I could possibly visit her. She was still in the emergency room when I arrived, waiting for a surgical procedure.

What a pleasant surprise to find that his niece was Faye Smith, an active member of Harmony United Methodist Church in the Danville District. I had met her while serving as District Superintendent there, when Harmony was on a two-point charge served by a part-time retired pastor, Rev. Fletcher Hardy. Combined average attendance in the two churches was about 25, and together they paid the pastor only \$7,400. That was 1997. The floor joists in the sanctuary were rotting and the floor was sagging and the members' spirits were low.

Faye and I had a delightful visit. "Let me tell you about our church," she said. "We have young families, children and youth!" Just last Sunday three young people joined. Their parents haven't joined yet, but are attending regularly.

"And let me tell you about Ralph. Ralph is a beagle dog that showed up at our church. No one knew who the owner was, but everyone welcomed him. He came to Vacation Bible School and kept coming to church every Sunday. One of our youth, a young girl,

wrote a note and attached it under Ralph's collar. 'We don't know you,' she said, 'but Ralph comes to church regularly and has become our friend. We would like for you to come with him, and become our friend too.' A few months ago Ralph's owner came, and has only missed one Sunday since!"

Is it any wonder that a congregation with such an inviting, caring spirit in a recent year (2012) showed a membership of 71 and an average attendance of 74. And in recent years, they have replaced the decayed floor joists, built new classrooms, a kitchen and fellowship hall, paved the parking lot, built and equipped a first-class playground, and purchased 10 surrounding acres for future expansion. And it's all paid for. The church pays 100 percent of their apportionments and contribute generously to missions both in the local community and overseas. They now have a full-time local pastor, the Rev. Robert Hardy, son of that retired pastor who first took me out to Harmony 16 years ago.

My prayer is that God's healing hand will enable those nuts, bolts, screws and rods in Faye's legs to give her strength to return to her home and to that caring fellowship at Harmony. I know that they – along with Ralph – are missing her!

-The Rev. Bob McArden
Roanoke

Further conferencing

Thank you for the continuing excellence of our conference *Advocate*.

For those individuals and church groups interested in pursuing further "conferencing" or discussion of sexuality issues in our church that seeks to be faithful to the Gospel and Christian tradition today, may I be permitted to note the analysis of our United Methodist position in my text, *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief*, 2nd. ed., 2009, ch. 12, that a number of churches have found helpful.

-The Rev. Christopher Morse,
retired Virginia Conference elder
and Dietrich Bonhoeffer Professor
Emeritus of Union Theological
Seminary living in New York City

Liberal views

I have been a Methodist and United Methodist for my entire life and read and enjoy the *Advocate*. However, I have just finished reading the letter from Richard Hagenston for the second time to be sure I read it correctly.

The fact that this extreme liberal opinion comes from a United Methodist "minister" is most disturbing. His reference to Christ's body as a "three-day old corpse" is most upsetting, and I am offended that he calls himself a United Methodist or a Christian at all. His views are more in line with being agnostic

(Continued on pg. 6)

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

LETTERS

(Continued from pg. 5)

than Christian. Is it possible that such attitudes as his are causing a decline in not only United Methodist memberships but others as well? I trust the Cabinet will take his liberal position strongly into consideration when finding an appointment for Rev. Hagenston, as I feel certain such opinions from the pulpit could cause great harm to a congregation. I fail to see where his liberalism could possibly serve to increase membership in The United Methodist Church of John Wesley.

I will pray for Rev. Hagenston and hope that he finds the true meaning to Christianity that faith and "believing in things unseen" offers.

-Carolyn W. Richardson
Market Street UMC,
Eastern Shore District

A true church "fight"

In June of 1961, just out of Duke Divinity School, I was assigned by Bishop Paul Neff Garber as the new associate at Centenary in downtown Richmond. Dr. Carl J. Sanders became the senior pastor there, having been the Richmond District superintendent. It was to be an eventful, exciting two years at Fifth and Grace streets. But I may be about the only one left who remembers witnessing a true church fight.

Early on, the trustees called a meeting with Dr. Sanders, who was later

elected as a bishop in 1972. The Quarterly Conference, as it was then called, had instructed the trustees to turn over certain funds on hand from some endowment left to the church, and the trustees said no, you do not tell us what to do, we tell you what to do, we refuse to turn over the funds at this time. The church building was in terrible shape and needed immediate repairs inside and out.

Dr. Sanders reminded the trustees that the Quarterly Conference was the top group to decide these matters, they were accountable to the Quarterly Conference. Furthermore, they informed Dr. Sanders that they ran the church, and for him not to forget it, and although he, Dr. Sanders, had been a DS and a top pastor in the Virginia Conference, they told the rest of the church what to do, etc. Dr. Sanders stormed out of the room and called for me to bring him a copy of the *Book of Discipline*, which I did. They met for another hour, and then Bishop Garber walked in and wanted to know where they were meeting, and I took him to the room. Another hour went by, finally the meeting was over with a request that Bishop Garber send a letter deciding who was right according to the *Discipline*. The letter came, ruling in favor of Dr. Sanders and the *Book of Discipline*. The trustees still would not abide by the ruling. So, Dr.

Sanders had the DS call a special session of the Quarterly Conference for the purpose of removing all nine trustees and electing new ones. The superintendent of the old Richmond District, who was the immediate past pastor at Centenary, backed out, and I was asked to preside as a recently ordained elder. I really did not know what to do, so Dr. Sanders presided. Following the motion that they be removed, a recess was called, and the trustees were asked to go next door and reconsider. Three of them repented, six did not, so the nine trustees were removed, six new ones elected, three re-elected, and the motion carried by one vote. Dr. Sanders had broken the tie.

Sadly, the church split over this meeting, and sadly, the former trustees began to die, one by one, and the families would call and asked that I come because the senior pastor had killed their husband. The new trustees released the funds, many great improvements were made and old Centenary Church in downtown Richmond is now a much stronger and much better church because of one man's courage: the late Bishop Carl Julian Sanders.

-The Rev. Henry E. Riley Jr.
Chesterfield



COMMENTARY

Movie 'Selma' sparks reflections on church, racism

By Gilbert H. Caldwell

Seeing the movie "Selma" with my family and an interracial group of viewers at a theater in Harlem brought back my personal memories of the Selma to Montgomery march.

The film offers all faithful United Methodists a chance to reflect on how the denomination of that time – with its structure of segregating African-American churches into the old Central Jurisdiction – dealt with racism. And it raises the question: What can The United Methodist Church of today learn from the film and its own history?

I was one of many clergy and religious leaders who responded to the "call" to come to Selma, Alabama, following "Bloody Sunday," when about 600 marchers were attacked on the Edmund Pettus Bridge with tear gas and billy clubs by state and local law enforcement officials.

One of the clergymen on the plane from Boston was the Rev. James Reeb, the white Unitarian minister who would be beaten and later die of his injuries. In the film, Reeb is called a "white nigger" for participating in the march. I took part in his memorial service at Arlington Street Unitarian Church in Boston.

The march was scheduled to begin the Tuesday

after "Bloody Sunday," but arrangements had not been completed for police and state trooper protection, so marchers walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, prayed and then returned to Selma on what became known as "Turnaround Tuesday."

I returned to Boston, then rejoined the march on the day before marchers entered Montgomery, presenting money raised in Boston to support the walkers.

Harry Belafonte had invited well-known entertainers from Hollywood and elsewhere to participate in the march and a rally that night. In his autobiography, "My Song: A Memoir of Art, Race and Defiance," Belafonte describes the rain and the mud of that day and evening, and lists the names of celebrities present.

He failed to write that Gil Caldwell, a 31-year-old Methodist preacher from Boston with no musical, comedic or acting ability, but with a deep commitment to racial justice, was on the stage with the entertainers. I will never forget it.

It is important to remember that the film is

not a documentary. Thus, whatever squabbles there are about the portrayal of President Lyndon Baines Johnson should fade into insignificance when placed next to the portrayal of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement.

Every American ought to see and then discuss this film!

It would be helpful if United Methodists and others view the film with open hearts and without anger, guilt, disbelief, denial, or a wish to revise our own history.

In 1963, just two years before

the Selma to Montgomery march, two Methodist bishops were among white clergy who posted a newspaper statement in Birmingham that agreed that social injustices existed but argued that the battle against racial segregation should be fought solely in the courts, not in the streets. In a veiled reference to King, they criticized "outsiders" who were causing trouble in the streets of Birmingham.

King responded with his famed "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."

A discussion of the movie by United Method-

ists would be enriched by remembering, not denying or revising, the debates in Methodism over slavery and the owning of slaves that resulted in the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church South in 1844.

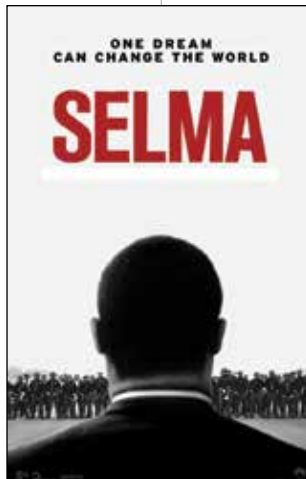
The movie speaks to current events, too.

The police violence in the film reminds us that many blacks view police violence against blacks through experience or awareness of history. Some do not understand why many of us respond to the killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner as reminders of a history of lynchings and violence instead of as isolated events.

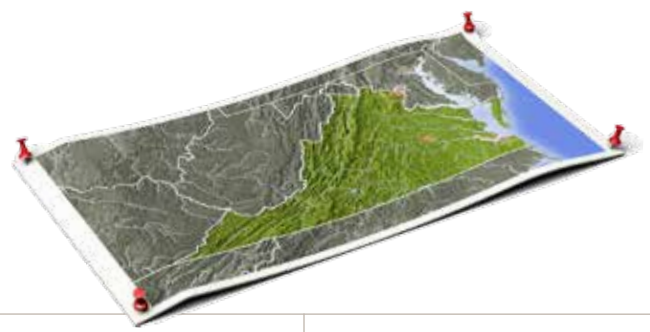
Those of us who are black should allow the film to help us imagine what it is to be a white ally or advocate of blacks and the black justice journey – allies such as Reeb and Viola Liuzzo, a white mother who was killed as she drove people home from the march.

We have not spent enough time in prayer, reflection, study and introspection to understand why we do and do not do in response to race. The Apostle Paul's "good, that I do, and do not" might be a helpful text as we discuss "Selma." 📖

-The Rev. Gil Caldwell is a retired elder and member of the Rocky Mountain Conference. He lives in Asbury Park, NJ.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Next 5 Talent Academy speaker lives a 'Simple Way' in the inner-city

By Daniel Wallace

"I can't help but think it makes God smile when the church comes together and challenges the patterns of this world."

In one of northern Philadelphia's most dangerous neighborhoods, a 20-person Christian group thrives, embracing a lifestyle of radical community.

Shane Claiborne helped found The Simple Way in 1995 as a faith community that lives and serves among the poor.

"We are not a church plant. We are a community plant," Claiborne, author of

several books including *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* and *Jesus for President*.

Members of The Simple Way community commit to alleviating poverty by living among the poor and sharing individual resources with them.

The Simple Way has birthed and connected many other radical Christian communities around the nation. The New Monasticism movement values living among the poor in dangerous parts of cities abandoned by the affluent.

Most Christians want to help the poor but refuse to invest in their world, Claiborne said – a distinction he doesn't consider biblical. The gospel propels Christ's followers toward people who are hurting, he insisted.

"It takes us to the pain, the poverty and those in need," he said.

The community lives simply and communally. Members share lawn mowers, washers and dryers, cars – and even their paychecks. Each member of the community gives 10 percent of his or her income to a common emergency fund. A medical collaborative can cover up to a \$150,000 incident for

Claiborne's community.

"We share stuff because we have community," he said. "We don't have community because we share stuff."

Praying for social and racial injustice also are central to the heartbeat of The Simple Way community. Claiborne's community meets every weekday morning to pray for the neighborhood and the injustices of the world.

"I think prayer is a really beautiful thing," he said. "For some of us involved in social justice, we forget to pray."

The Simple Way has transformed a formerly dark and dreary neighborhood into a creative display of the beauty of God, he said. Creativity has been restored through inspirational murals and artwork spread across buildings.

Furthermore, the community has taken initiative in gardening and landscaping projects to care properly for God's earth, a value essential to the community. The group also organizes a tutoring program for kids and a flag-football league.

"I can't help but think it makes God smile when the church comes together and challenges the patterns of this world," he said. 🍀



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

Shane Claiborne will lead the next 5 Talent Academy teaching session on Saturday, Feb. 21, at Ebenezer UMC in Stafford and live-streamed to nine sites around the conference:

Eastern Shore: Grace UMC (Parksley); Lynchburg: Park View Community Mission; Martinsville: First UMC; Richmond: Woodlake UMC; Roanoke: Thrasher Memorial UMC; Shenandoah Valley: Bridge-water UMC; Tidewater: Grace Harbor UMC; Winchester: Macedonia UMC; and Yorktown: St. Luke's UMC.

Claiborne graduated from Eastern University and did graduate work at Princeton Seminary. His adventures have taken him from the streets of Calcutta, where he worked with Mother Teresa, to the wealthy suburbs of Chicago, where he served at the mega-church Willow Creek. His writing has appeared in *Esquire*, *Christianity Today* and *The Wall Street Journal*, and he has appeared on everything from Fox News to Al Jazeera. He's working on a new book, called *Executing Faith*, and hopes to hang out with Pope Francis when the pontiff visits Philadelphia in September. Follow him at Facebook (ShaneClaiborne) or Twitter (@ShaneClaiborne).

Crawford leaving Treasurer's office after 40 years of conference service

Carol Crawford, who currently handles church receipts in the conference Treasurer's office, will be leaving her job at the end of January. She has served on conference staff since 1974.

In her more than 40 years working for the Virginia Conference, Crawford has seen a lot of changes.

"The churches have advanced a lot," she says. "When I started working for the conference, some churches had outdoor plumbing."

So, too, has the office of the conference Treasurer. In her position, Crawford has processed remittances for apportionments and other mission funds and served as the liaison person to church treasurers.

"We didn't have computers, of course," Crawford said, "and things were not as involved as they are now. We sent the information out on a tape and it came back as four sets of statements with carbon paper in between. We used a machine to separate the statements and remove the carbon paper before we distributed them."

Crawford actually started in the office mail-room before moving into the Treasurer's office after almost 10 years. She came to the conference from a position with Equifax, the

credit agency.

Veteran conference workers talk about conditions in "the old building" on Broad Street in downtown Richmond, before the office moved to its much more modern digs in Glen Allen. Crawford does have a fond memory of the old building, which now houses part of the Virginia Game and Inland Fisheries offices.

"(My husband) Carl and I were married in that building," she said. "(Rev.) Peter Vaughn did the service."

In a statement, conference Treasurer David Dommissie explained the rationale for Crawford's departure.

"In response to reduced funding in the Conference Treasurer's office for 2015, the Council on Finance & Administration Personnel Committee reviewed the staffing levels in the Treasurer's office," Dommissie said. "It was determined that the Church Receipts position would be eliminated effective Jan. 31, 2015. All responsibilities of this position will then be shared among the Treasurer's office staff."

Dommissie also praised Crawford's "loyalty and dedication."

"She has worked with four conference treasurers and supported thousands of local church treasurers during her tenure," he




Carol Crawford

said. "Carol will be greatly missed by all who worked with her, and we wish her many blessings during this transition."

Crawford also worked with six Virginia Conference bishops: Kenneth Goodson, Rob Blackburn, Tom Stockton, Joe Pennell, Charlene Kammerer and Young Jin Cho.

But working with local church treasurers and pastors has always been her favorite part of the job.

"I've always enjoyed talking to people across the conference and helping them as much as I could," she said.

If you have questions about how this affects the services provided by the Treasurer's office, contact Dommissie at (804) 521-1100. 

-Neill Caldwell

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Jorge Acevedo to lead Virginia Wesleyan clergy seminar in March

The Rev. Jorge Acevedo, lead pastor at Grace Church, a multi-site United Methodist congregation in Southwest Florida (Cape Coral, Fort Myers Shores and North Fort Myers) with more than 2,600 in attendance each week, will present on the topic “Turbo-Charging the

Wesleyan Tradition in the 21st Century” for a two-day continuing education seminar March 16-17 at Virginia Wesleyan College in Norfolk.

The Virginia Wesleyan series offers one continuing education credit for clergy. Acevedo is a graduate of both Asbury College and Asbury Theological Seminary. He was ordained deacon in the Florida Conference in 1986 and an elder in 1990. He was the 2001 recipient of the Denman Evangelism Award from the Florida Conference. In 2009, the Foundation for Evangelism named Acevedo the 2009 Distinguished Evangelist of The United Methodist Church. Acevedo serves on the Southeastern Jurisdiction and Florida Conference Episcopal Committees and has been very involved in the Walk to Emmaus.


He authored *Vital: Churches Changing Communities and the World* (Abingdon Press, 2013). He co-authored *The Heart of Youth Ministry* (Bristol House, 1989) with Hule Goddard. He has also written for the United Methodist Publishing House, *Circuit Rider* magazine, *Good News* magazine and *Our Faith Today*.

Acevedo explains that “God used the Wesleys and the early Methodist movement to transform not just the church but the culture. Their unique approach to the Gospel has transferable principles that if harnessed in the 21st century can once again transform the

“God used the Wesleys and the early Methodist movement to transform not just the church but the culture. Their unique approach to the Gospel have transferable principles that if harnessed in the 21st century can once again transform the church and culture.”

church and culture.”

Using his 19 years as pastor at a single church, Rev. Acevedo will share some of these transferable principles and their unique application and results in this setting.

The 2015 Clergy Seminar will begin at 8:30 a.m. on March 16 and conclude at noon on March 17. Lunch will be served on March 16. The cost is \$75. Registration may be done online at vwc.edu. For more information, call Jodi Bryant, Church Relations coordinator at Virginia Wesleyan College, at (757) 455-3217 or e-mail jbryant@vwc.edu. 



The Rev. Jorge Acevedo

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

Imagine No Malaria resources for Lent available on website

New Imagine No Malaria resources for Lent can be downloaded from the conference website. Go to vaumc.org/imagenomalaria and click on "Church Resources." Scroll through the folders in the "box" until you find the folder named "Lent Resources NEW!"

That folder includes great PowerPoint backgrounds, graphics for Facebook and Twitter, and worship resources for your church to use now.

The seven weeks of materials, which extend through Easter Sunday,

feature a series of Lent-focused themes, including "Give Up Indifference," "Give Up Excess," "Take Up the Charge," "Take Up the Challenge," "Lift Up the Hurting," "Lift Up The Healed" and "Look Up to Overcome." Additional materials include prayers, hymn suggestions, altar decoration ideas and videos to share in small groups or with the congregation.

Imagine No Malaria, an initiative from The United Methodist Church, is committed to ending death and suffering from malaria through prevention, com-

munication, trained health workers and facilities, and grassroots education. To date, INM has raised 86 percent of its goal with more than \$65 million in gifts and pledges. United Methodists across the world are working hard to reach and celebrate the initiative's \$75 million goal before the denomination's General Conference in 2016.

For more information, contact Maria Maxwell, Virginia Conference Imagine No Malaria field coordinator, at MariaMaxwell@vaumc.org or (804) 521-1160. 📞



What makes a neighborhood?

The church isn't just a building, and a neighborhood isn't just a group of houses.

Heart Havens empowers your neighbors with intellectual disabilities to live full and vibrant lives with as much independence as possible in neighborhoods across the Conference.



February is Heart Havens Month.

Help us empower our neighbors.
Volunteer. Donate. Advocate.

*For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command:
"Love your neighbor as yourself."*

Galatians 5:14 (NIV)

Heart Havens

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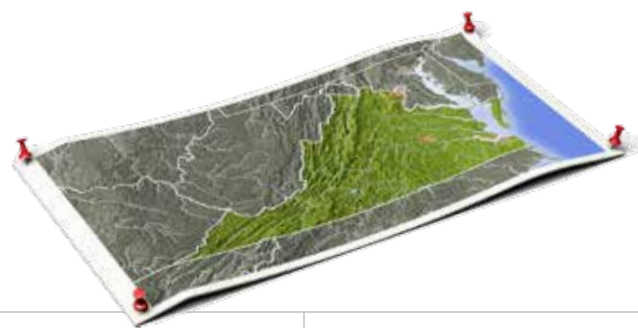


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The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Russell was one of a kind

By Catherine D. Morgan



When Patti B. Russell died on Dec. 2, the Virginia Conference lost an extraordinary layperson.

At Patti's retirement in 2007, Bishop Charlene Kammerer noted that Patti had been a part of the very "bone marrow" of the conference. Her remarkable career in worship ministry, social justice matters and the preservation and interpretation of Methodist history spanned more than 50 years.

Patti began her ministry at Clarendon Church in Arlington in the 1950s. Marriage and various moves brought her to Centenary in Richmond, Pace Memorial in Richmond, Williamsburg UMC and finally Duncan Memorial UMC in Ashland. The Rev. David Hindman, officiating at her funeral, joked that Patti may be the only Methodist layperson who itinerated!

Patti was a strong lady, not intimidated by preachers or status. She did not suffer fools lightly. She mixed with all levels of the church – serving as delegate to Annual, General and Jurisdictional conferences.

She had a passion for excellence in worship, serving on the Commission on Worship of the General Board of Discipleship of the newly formed United Methodist Church. There

she worked to create new liturgy for the new denomination. When we use the Service of Word and Table or the Great Thanksgiving, we can remember with gratitude that Patti's fingerprints are all over our liturgy.

Patti expanded her interest in social justice ministries while at Pace Memorial UMC on the campus of Virginia Commonwealth University, a church serving both students and the homeless poor who called Monroe Park home. From organizing a feeding program at Pace, Patti moved on to spearhead a feeding program run by the churches around Stuart Circle. As volunteer director, she managed all the workers from city and suburban churches. And when the city tried to shut down the feeding ministry, Patti refused to surrender to government pressure. She recruited Constitutional experts who testified that feeding the hungry was part of the free expression of religion.

We met in 1980 when I became a trustee of the Virginia Conference Historical Society. It was in this arena that we became especially close. Patti began her service in historical circles as an early member and later officer of the first district historical society in Methodism, the Methodist Historical Society of Northern Virginia. In 1963 she helped create the Jacob Simpson Payton Memorial Library and Museum in

the Alexandria/Arlington District office building.

Upon marrying and moving to Richmond in the 1970s, Patti established the conference archives in cramped and inappropriate space in the former conference headquarters then on Broad Street. She acquired the Northern Virginia archival collection when it was closed and merged it into the conference archives. She served as the volunteer archivist until 2008, a span of more than 30 years. With her keen sense of humor, at her retirement Patti remarked that when she found out what the conference was considering paying a new archivist, she was tempted to apply for the job and ask for back pay!

When the conference decided to move its offices from West Broad Street to Glen Allen, Patti worked with the architects to design an archival space. She was adamant that the floor be reinforced to hold the heavy compact shelving needed in the new archives. In 2002 she supervised the move to the new facility in Glen Allen, and later the installation of the efficient and space-saving shelving.

A member of the conference Historical Society since 1965, Patti is the only person to have been a founding member of all three of the Society's foundations – the Old Stone Church Foundation, the William Watters Foundation, and the Old Brunswick

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

Circuit Foundation – where her commitment to the restoration, preservation, and promotion of historic sites was a source of inspiration and awe.

Patti capped her service to the Virginia Conference by editing *Virginia United Methodist Heritage* magazine from 1991-2009. *Heritage* is the scholarly journal published by the Historical Society since 1973. By seeking out promising authors and emphasizing excellence in research and writing, her work increased the periodical's reputation for in-depth treatment of important historic issues.

It is no wonder then that in June 2014 the Historical Society of The United Methodist Church recognized Patti's exceptional contributions and service to preserving the history of Virginia Methodism by presenting her with the Ministry of Memory Award.

Patti's husband, Jack, himself a layperson of note in the Virginia Conference, died just 43 days after her, on Jan. 14

To honor Patti at her retirement, the Patti B. Russell Archives Endowment fund was established through the Virginia United Methodist Foundation. Contributions in her memory may be sent to the Foundation via the United Methodist Center, P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058. 📧

-Catherine D. Morgan is a past president of the Virginia Conference Historical Society.

Joyner's new book takes different view of Israel-Palestinian divide

What does the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians look like when Christians view it in light of the crucifixion and resurrection? These are the critical questions Eastern Shore District Superintendent the Rev. Alex Joyner explores in a new book published by The Englewood Review of Books. *A Space for Peace in the Holy Land: Listening to Modern Israel and Palestine* presents a brief history of the conflict interwoven with stories of peacemakers working in unusual and creative ways. The book also offers a theological reflection on the empty tomb of Jesus Christ as an "open space" where Christians can pray and work for peace and reconciliation in the Middle East.

A Space for Peace invites the Christian reader to bring all of the region's modern history to the empty tomb. Here the reader meets people like a Palestinian Christian family who established an unlikely brewery in the West Bank and the Israeli Jewish and Palestinian residents of Wahat al-Salam/Neve Shalom, a village where they have been living together in a 30-year experiment.

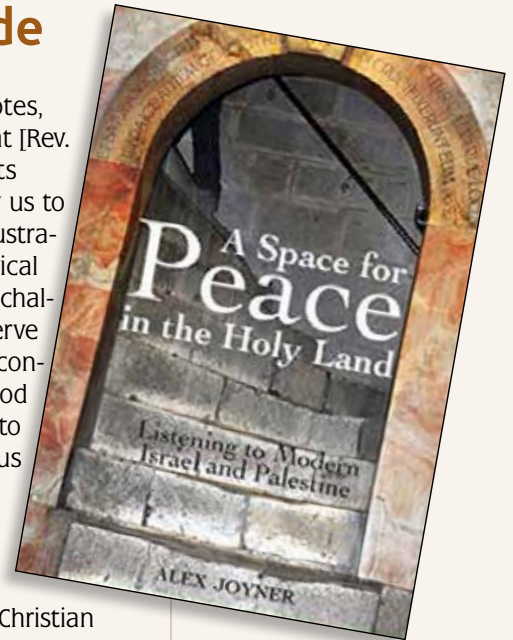
Retired United Methodist Bishop Tim Whitaker provides a foreword

in which he notes, "The vision that [Rev. Joyner] presents does not allow us to succumb to frustration or ideological posturing, but challenges us to serve the work of reconciliation that God has entrusted to us through Jesus Christ."

A Space for Peace in the Holy Land is a resource for Christian churches seeking to make a just and faithful response to the suffering experienced by the people of the Holy Land – Christians, Jews, and Muslims. It is suitable for use by small groups, large groups and individuals studying the region.

C. Christopher Smith, co-author of *Slow Church: Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus*, says "A Space for Peace in the Holy Land is a particularly helpful resource that sheds light on the conflict between Israel and Palestine. This little book is essential reading for any Christian who desires to understand and to be engaged in this conflict."

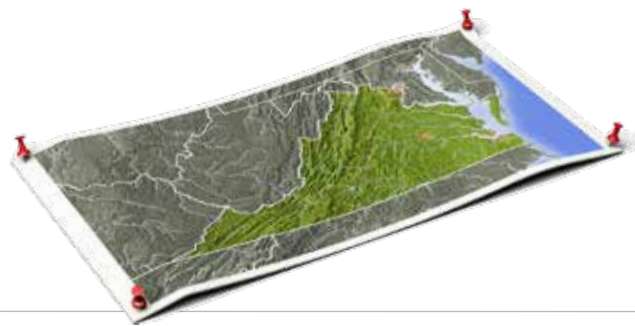
The book is currently available in e-book format on Amazon at the link <http://j.mp/ASpaceForPeace>. Joyner has five previous publications through



Abingdon Press including *What's in the Bible About Us?* and *Hard Times Come Again No More: Suffering and Hope*. He has been a regular contributor to FaithLink, a United Methodist curriculum connecting current events and faith. 📧



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



United Methodist schools equip clergy in Virginia

The Virginia Conference is blessed to have six United Methodist-related schools within our borders.

Our United Methodist churches have a close and historic relationship with Ferrum College, Randolph College, Randolph Macon Academy, Randolph Macon College, Virginia Wesleyan College and Shenandoah University. These institutions of higher learning were established by our ancestors in the faith.

So many of our local churches have alumni who hail from one of these six schools and provide distinctive leadership in their respective congregations.

These schools continue to offer numerous opportunities for students to be engaged in serving their communities and beyond thus promoting the Wesleyan tradition of carrying out deeds of mercy.

A recent poll confirms some rather astonishing information. Of our 900 clergy in the Virginia Conference, 412 have received their education at one or more of these six schools. The good news is that our schools continue to develop pastors for ministry to serve our local churches. The churches that support the Virginia Education Fund apportionment are bearing significant fruit by enabling the nurturing and equipping of our clergy. One or more of these pastors trained by one of our United Methodist schools may very well be appointed to your congregation.

Thank you to all of our churches who support the Virginia Education Fund and provide a steady stream of well-trained clergy and laity. 🐾

-The Rev. John Peters is director of the Association of Educational Institutions.





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EVENTS

FEBRUARY

United Methodist Day at the General Assembly

Feb. 5, Bon Air UMC and State Capitol, Richmond

This is an annual opportunity to help faith communities become empowered to serve as missionaries of justice, as well as the more traditional missionaries of mercy. By joining together and establishing relationships with our elected officials, we empower members of our congregations to wonder, "How can I make a difference? How can I be a Good Samaritan in our world to its fullest sense?" This event gives congregations a vehicle for reaching beyond themselves and introduces them to the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church in a meaningful way. The cost is \$25, which includes breakfast and lunch. Visit the conference website to register, or for more information, contact the Rev. Pat Shipley at **(804) 353-1387** or at plsrevdoc@aol.com.

5 Talent Academy

Feb. 21, Ebenezer UMC, Stafford, and webcast to sites around the conference

Author and activist Shane Claiborne will talk about ministry with the poor in the next teaching event sponsored by the 5 Talent Academy, which helps existing churches with resources and education. Claiborne is one of the founders of The Simple Way, a ministry in inner-city Philadelphia. For more information, visit www.vaumc.org/5TalentAcademy.

Lay Servant Academy

Feb. 21-22, Blackstone

This year's Lay Servant Academy will offer 11 of the courses required for becoming or re-certifying as a Lay Servant. (One is required every three years from a list of 22.) It will also offer five of the required courses for Lay Speaker qualification, plus 10 exploratory classes that are two or four hours in length and are designed for those interested in a topic and looking for information about the ministry or the full course of study. The theme is "From Members to Disciples." A brochure on the conference website includes class descriptions, contact and registration information. You can find the information under "Events" and the dates. For more information contact David Bailey at **(804) 338-3168**,

or dw.bailey@comcast.net. For registration questions contact Cyndi Schnell at **(434) 292-5308** or CyndiSchnell@vumac.org.

Lord, Teach Me to Pray

Feb. 21, Williamsburg UMC

Wendy Miller, who teaches spiritual formation at three seminaries, will lead workshops on prayer. Cost is \$20, which includes lunch. For more information or to register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date.

MARCH

Clergy Spouses' Retreat

March 5-7, Blackstone

"Is It Well With Your Soul?" is the theme of this year's retreat, organized by the conference's Clergy Family Enrichment Committee. Speakers will include Dr. Dawn Peck, a member of Trinity UMC in Lexington and certified spiritual director; Dr. Lisa Rochford, a clinical psychologist and clergy spouse; and the Rev. Charlie Reynolds, executive director of Virginia Conference Wellness Ministries. There will again be special interest activities, a roundtable discussion of life as a clergy family, and music will be provided by Josh Wortham. The cost of the entire weekend is \$100, but you can come as a day participant for \$30 a session. For more information, contact the Center for Clergy Excellence at **(804) 521-1126** or **1-800-768-6040, ext. 126**.

Bishop's Convocation on Prayer

March 21, Trinity UMC, Richmond

The Rev. Sue Nilson-Kibbey, director of Missional Church Initiatives for the West Ohio Conference, will be the plenary speaker for this event. An ordained elder in The United Methodist Church, Nilson-Kibbey was executive pastor at Ginghamburg UMC in Ohio for more than 10 years. She is the author of *Ultimately Responsible: When You're in Charge of Igniting a Ministry*, *Transformation Journal: A One Year Journey through the Bible*, and *Starting a Single Adult Ministry*, and is the creator of the *Ministry by Strengths* program. There will also be 13 workshops for participants. Registration information is on the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date.

DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



▲ **Reveille UMC, Richmond District**, packed more than 20,000 meals for Stop Hunger Now in late October as part of the congregation's special Sunday focus on community service. Members also prepared meals for the homeless and worked with members of the Swansboro neighborhood.



▲ United Methodist Women from the **Elizabeth River District** collected \$115 for the Imagine No Malaria initiative during the November District Luncheon at **Wesley Chapel UMC**. Under the theme of "Every Life Save a Life" they joined the Virginia Conference goal to save at least 100,000 lives. The outgoing UMW District President, Carolyn Patterson, encouraged all members to "tell the story to everyone at all times" and challenged them to invite others to join their effort to bless their communities through initiatives like Imagine No Malaria. More than 40 women attended this gathering. The Rev. Lynda Moore from **West End UMC** was the day's speaker.

Standardsville United Methodist Women completed the UMW Reading Program with a total of 180 books read and reported. The women



▲ formed a reading group which meets five times a year with the goal to be in synch with the purpose of the UMW: "to know God – to develop a creative, supportive fellowship and expand the concepts of mission." Standardsville UMC is in the Charlottesville District.



▲ **The Northview UMC United Methodist Women's "Knit-Wits"** have knitted baby hats, baby sweaters and prayer shawls. Northview is in Hollins, Roanoke District.



▲ Fourteen youths from **Wesley UMC in Winchester** collected and prepared 61 shoe box gifts for the Fauquier County Food Coalition. The gifts were handed out to children at the December food distribution.

Galloway UMC in Falls Church hosted its second Angel Tree Christmas Party on Dec. 14. Twenty-six chil-



dren and their families were invited to share in a day that began with morning service featuring an original Christmas play performed by the youth of Galloway. Then all transitioned to the Fellowship Hall, which had been transformed into a Christmas wonderland by the "elves" (pictured). The children enjoyed crafts, listened to the story of the birth of Jesus and had a kid-friendly lunch of pizza, spaghetti, cheesy bread, cookies and cupcakes. Santa came to visit and handed out gifts and candy canes to all of the children. "The love of Christ is not something that we just talk about on Sunday morning," said the Rev. James Page Jr., Galloway's pastor. "We try to live it out in our everyday walk with Him. The joy came when we received letters from the parents who were incarcerated expressing how grateful they were that their children would get something for Christmas from them. God's gift to us is Jesus; our gift to the families in our community is Agape love back to them." ▲

The Evangelism Committee at **Andrew Chapel in Montross, Fredericksburg District**, has initiated a new program where groups of people

DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



who dedicate their lives to serving the citizens of Westmoreland County are recognized. Under the leadership of Edith Davison and Joyce Hobbs, the group recently visited Cople Elementary School with a basket of homemade cookies to say "thank you" to the staff of 63 persons. Pictured are Sheri Almond, Cople's principal, Pastor Shayne Estes and Joyce Hobbs. ▲



▲ **Mount Pleasant/Lamps UMC in Winchester** planted a community garden to help those in need. Every Monday the community garden team met to weed and tend the garden. Then on Sunday mornings before worship, a table was set up with free produce available to anyone who passed by the church. Leftover produce was taken to the local food bank. The team hopes to expand the garden project in the coming year.

Hundreds of people in the U.S. 1 corridor in Alexandria did not go without gifts for Christmas thanks to the members of **Rising Hope UMC**. The church distributed 375 baskets to families, 2,000 gifts for children, and about 70 homeless were fed on Christmas day. The church also gave out an additional 200 gifts specifically



to the homeless (things like thermals, gloves, hats, scarves, etc.). Pictured: (above) Mike Hogan displays his gift; (top of page) the Barbosa family, with members from both Ecuador and Nicaragua, wanted to give thanks for all the opportunities they have received in this country so they bought, prepared and served the Christmas meal to all that walked into Rising Hope on Christmas Day. ▲



▲ Many of the **Staunton District** churches marched in their local communities Christmas parades this year, reports district director of Congregational Resources Beth Christian. **Sherando UMC** (Pastor Sarah Payne) made the front page of their local newspaper!

▼ Members at **Cherry Hill UMC** in South Boston recently heard a program on Malawi in Africa, where people lack access to emergency health care in many areas. Members responded to raise funds for a small blood freezer for a local clinic there. There was a BBQ dinner and many individuals, area churches and civic organizations donated funds for the project. While the goal was \$3000, God allowed more than \$9,000 to be raised! This purchased a larger blood freezer, a blood analyzer and the items necessary to collect the blood.



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





"I THINK HE IS GONE AGAIN," I RESPONDED.

By Glenn Rowley

The caller was asking about the whereabouts of Rev. Sam Nesmith. She was trying to find out if she could still sign up for a trip Sam was leading to Tangier Island. I gave her Sam's contact information and told her that he was really good about responding IF he was in the country, but she should not hesitate because he might be "here today and gone tomorrow."

If there is one person in the Virginia Conference (besides the Bishop) who does not need an introduction, it is Sam Nesmith. When I arrived in Virginia five years ago, Sam was one of the first to come to meet me. He didn't introduce himself as the world's oldest living United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) leader, but after he began to talk and I learned that he was closing in on 70 trips at that time, that is the first thought that came to my mind. He has let me jokingly introduce him that way a couple of times.

As a "career" missionary who started missionary service about the time UMVIM exploded as a hands-on opportunity for many United Methodists, I was like many of my colleagues skeptical of how effective it would be. It didn't take long before I came to see what a tremendous difference it was making not only in the lives of those who were receiving UMVIM teams but also by transforming the lives of team members.

Sam is one of those transformational disciples. From Russia to Virginia and many, many places in between, Sam has made a difference in people's lives because of his love for God's people no matter their culture or language. His harmonica and infectious laugh crosses those boundaries, and his energetic faith inspires friendships and partnerships in Christ.

If you can get him to stand still long enough, please thank him for being a true mission ambassador and witness to the transformative love of Christ. 🍷

-The Rev. Glenn Rowley is the director of the conference Center for Justice and Missional Excellence.



GOD IS IN THE MISSION

By Nathan Decker

"Thank you, God, for this good life and forgive us if we do not love it enough."

- Garrison Keillor

The first time I met the Rev. Sam NeSmith, he handed me a bucket filled with a rough mixture of gravel and Haitian concrete mix.

"Here you go," he laughed, "It's good for you!"

By the end of the day we had poured a floor in a classroom one bucket at a time. The mix had slopped up and down my bib overalls so thick that when I took them off they stood up on their own.

But Sam's words were truth. Mission work is good for us.

There was a time I naively thought that spending thousands of dollars on airfare and supplies to build something in another part of the world was the most efficient way to do things. Several trips later, I know we are not in the 1800s mission movement any longer. Mission today is less about building schools and churches and more about building relationships and discipleship.

The reality is that we could send the money, hire professionals and get the job done more efficiently. Unfortunately this style of doing things sets up a relationship of dependency. Instead, we send United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) teams to create partnerships where each party provides



what

they can and we work together.

Sure, we're not professionals – and we may not know the Cambodian way of painting a fence post – but we can learn.

More than that, we can learn from our Christian sisters and brothers in other lands how they are experiencing God. I may have brought a hammer and a saw to give away in Haiti, but I learned a lesson from a little boy about sharing that I'll never forget. I may have taught lessons on leadership to pastors in Cambodia, but I'll never forget the joy and excitement of a growing young church that they shared with me.

Mission trips are not just about reaching out to make disciples in a far-off land. When I go on a mission trip, I'm learning how to be a better disciple, too. Whether it is when Sam shared a Richard Foster devotional book with me or when we had deep conversation about where God is calling us to go next in the mission – the Spirit is at work. Even when in a worship service preached in a tongue I couldn't understand but in a heart I could discern, I felt moved.

We go on missions to encourage young growing churches. We go on missions to develop relationships and partnerships. We go on missions to make and be better disciples. We go on mission trips because God is in the mission. "Here you go, it's good for you."

"So here's what I think: The best thing you can do right now is to finish what you started last year and not let those good intentions grow stale. Your heart's been in the right place all along. You've got what it takes to finish it up, so go to it." - 2 Corinthians 8:10-11 The Message

-The Rev. Nathan Decker is leading an UMVIM team of Young Adults to Cambodia in June. If you are interested in going on this trip, please contact him at NathanDecker@vaumc.org.





EIGHT REASONS I WAS WRONG ABOUT SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIPS

By Rich Birch

I used to think short-term mission trips were a complete waste of resources and a distraction from our church's core mission. They basically amounted to "petting the poor" or "poverty tourism." But my attitude changed after recently having the privilege of leading a short-term trip. It helped me appreciate the ways short-term mission experiences can be an important part of a church's discipleship strategy.

CREATING AWARENESS OF THE UNIVERSAL HUMAN

EXPERIENCE: Mission trip participants are reminded that people are people. Whether they are across the street or around the world, people have the same needs. They want to know and be known. And they need Jesus. Participants come home from mission trips more mindful of the need to care for the people in their own communities.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES OF SERVING IN OTHER

CULTURES: There are unique challenges to serving in every community and culture. It's one thing to talk about those challenges. It's entirely different to get up close and see those challenges first hand. Being informed at this level gives trip participants the ability to be more informed advocates when they return home.

ASSUMING THE ROLES OF LEARNER, SERVANT AND HELPER:

Often mission trip participants have a job where they are the expert or teacher or leader. Mission trips are a gift to these people because they provide the opportunity to be in the role of learner or servant or helper. Jesus said that we're called to be the "servant of all," and these trips give people the opportunity to actually do that.

BECOMING MORE GENEROUS: Can I be honest for a minute? For those from rich northern countries traveling to developing southern countries, the next best step following a short-term mission trip is becoming a donor and advocate. The biggest way we can provide long-term

"help" is to go home and figure out how to restructure our lives to be more generous. Seeing the needs first hand generates a depth of knowledge and empathy that no amount of spreadsheets, emotional videos or glossy photos can generate. People get informed and motivated. And they become smarter and more generous with their financial resources.

GAINING CLARITY ON OUR ECONOMIC STATUS: This is related to people becoming more generous, but it's more personal. A well-executed short-term mission trip makes people aware of the fact that they are among the rich minority in the world. Some people end up experiencing this as guilt, which can be a good start. But ultimately the hope is to move people beyond feeling bad to the place where they feel thankful that they have the opportunity to steward the resources God has given them.

DEPENDING ON GOD, MAYBE FOR THE FIRST TIME: Our culture is structured to be predictable, safe and comfortable. It often removes the chance for people to be dependent on God because there is little opportunity for stuff to go wrong. Short-term mission trips move people out of their comfort zones and force them to face the fact that they aren't in control ... maybe for the first time in their lives. This can give people greater clarity on their place in the universe and helps to reset their relationship with Jesus.

GETTING PEOPLE OUT OF THEIR SEATS: A core part of engaging the people in our church is to get them out of their seats and engaged in the mission. These trips are a chance for people to serve, to give back and to be part of what God is doing. This draws them in closer and helps them get more connected with their church.

SEEING WITH NEW EYES: While it isn't always polite or comfortable to name this reality, people traveling on short-term mission trips often are a part of wealthy, dominant cultures. They are traveling to poorer countries and often being led by incredibly talented people who look totally different from them, often people who would be part of the "minority" culture in our country. I love the impact this can have on people as they see others from various cultures in a different light than is often portrayed by the dominant culture at home.

-The Rev. Rich Birch serves as operations pastor at Liquid Church in New Jersey.



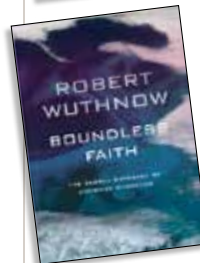
MISSION RESOURCES

“Mission trips” provide the partnering countries and churches – in this case, the USA and the church in the USA and Cambodia and the church in Cambodia – the opportunity to take part together in God’s plans and movement on both sides of the earth. By these means, God brings about a transformation in the hearts, spirits, minds and lives of God’s peoples beyond their own wildest imaginings. In the case of Sam, he has been involved in other countries besides Cambodia. How could the richness of such an experience and the impact of such an involvement be possibly measured even by the heart? What wonders can God bring about through and in God’s peoples – among the nations – by such means?

-Romeo del Rosario, GBGM's country director for the Cambodian Methodist Mission



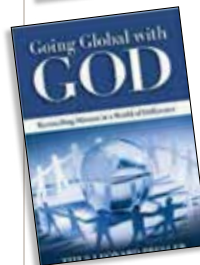
A Mission Journey: A Handbook for Volunteers from the General Board of Global Ministries, Discipleship Resources, 2013



Boundless Faith: The Global Outreach of American Churches by Robert Wuthnow. University of California Press, 2009.



Effective Engagement in Short-Term Missions: Doing It Right! by Robert Priest. William Carey Library Press, 2008.



Going Global with God: Reconciling Mission in a World of Difference by Titus Leonard Presler. Morehouse Publishing, 2010.



Helping Without Hurting in Short-Term Missions by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert. Moody Publishers, 2014.



Serving with Eyes Wide Open: Doing Short-Term Missions with Cultural Intelligence by David A. Livermore. Books, 2011.



SEJ UMVIM

The Southeastern Jurisdiction maintains a United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) office in Alabama and an informative website, <http://umvim.org>. You can sign up for a weekly newsletter, find training events, make a donation to support mission trips or learn about an opportunity to organize a team of your own. The website home page currently features a story about Virginia Conference missionaries Nancy and Kip Robinson and how Ebola has kept them in the U.S. For information, you can call **(205) 453-9480** or **1-800-659-0609**, or e-mail sejinfo@umvim.org.



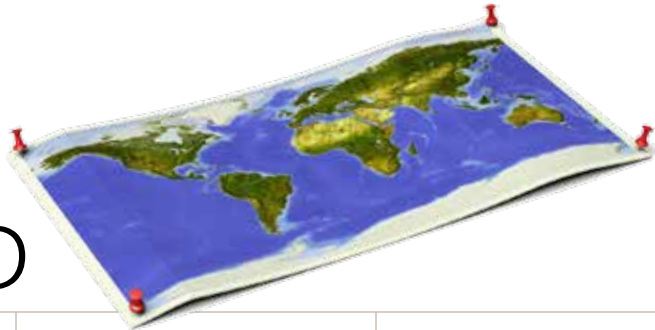
SHORT-TERM MISSION PROGRAM

Perhaps you have been on a short-term mission experience which had such an impact on you that you want to do more. Perhaps you are looking for a way to put your faith into action through service. The Individual Volunteer Program sponsored by Global Ministries can help you fulfill both of those needs and more. This program offers opportunities for individuals and couples to serve in mission from two months to two years in a variety of placement settings around the world. The opportunities for service are diverse, including case managers for refugees, teachers, pastors, camp directors and children and youth assistants.

To learn more about these placements and other details of the program, please visit website www.individualvolunteers.info. If you feel you are being called to this important ministry, contact Malcolm Frazier at mfrazier@umcmis-sion.org or call **(212) 870-3659**.



Religious news from around the NATION & WORLD



Complaint against Bishop Talbert resolved without trial

By Heather Hahn

The complaint against retired United Methodist Bishop Melvin G. Talbert – who blessed the union of two men in violation of church law – has ended in what the denomination calls a just resolution.

The resolution, agreed to by all parties in this complaint, means that Talbert will not face a church trial or possible loss of his clergy credentials.

Instead, the joint resolution agreement calls on all parties to follow the *Book of Discipline* and urges the Council of Bishops to do more work related to the denomination's longtime debate around human sexuality. The resolution also expresses regret "over harm

to gay and lesbian sisters and brothers, and all those involved, through the complaint process."

Mountain Sky Area Bishop Elaine Stanovsky, president of the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops, announced the complaint's conclusion. Before his retirement, Talbert served in the Western Jurisdiction, which encompasses the eight westernmost conferences in the United States. Church law requires that complaints against bishops be heard in the jurisdiction where the bishop is a member.

"The Just Resolution Agreement achieved by the complainants and Bishop Talbert is a reminder that United Methodists don't have to be divided by their differences," Stanovsky said. "The conflicted parties came together, prayerfully listened to one another, challenged one another, and searched for God's guidance for them-

selves and for the church."

The United Methodist Council of Bishops on Nov. 15, 2013, requested the complaint be filed against Talbert, after he officiated at the union of two United Methodist men – Joe Openshaw and Bobby Prince – on Oct. 25, 2013, near Birmingham, Ala.

The *Book of Discipline*, the church's law book, has stated since 1972 that all people are of sacred worth, but "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching." Church law bans United Methodist clergy from performing and churches from hosting "ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions."

Before the ceremony, both Birmingham Area Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett and the Executive Committee of the Council of Bishops asked Talbert not to officiate.

The Council of Bishops requested that Germany Area Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, then the council's president, and Wallace-Padgett, who leads the North Alabama Conference, submit the complaint. They did so in March last year.

The complaint accused Talbert of "undermining the ministry of a colleague (§12702.1f) and conducting a ceremony to celebrate the marriage of a same gender couple (§12702.1b) within the bounds of the North Alabama Conference."

After the complaint was filed, Stanovsky initiated a supervisory response. §1413.3b in the *Book of Dis-*

Bishop Melvin Talbert (right) poses after performing the wedding of Joe Openshaw and Bobby Prince in Alabama. Photo by Laura Rossbert.



Religious news from around the NATION & WORLD

cipline, the denomination's law book, says a supervisory response is a review of the bishop's ministry that "shall be directed toward a just resolution" of the complaint. "It is not part of any judicial process" that precedes a trial, the law book says.

A press release from Stanovsky said the process "focused on repairing harm, achieving accountability by making things right as far as possible and bringing healing to all the parties." The *Discipline* also calls church trials "an expedient of last resort."

The supervisory team included Stanovsky and Phoenix Area Bishop Robert Hoshibata, secretary of the College of Bishops, and one clergy and one lay member of the jurisdictional committee on episcopacy. Talbert, Wallace-Padgett and Wenner were also part of the conversations. Under church law, those conversations are confidential.

The resulting agreement, Stanovsky said, "acknowledges their differences, allows each their distinctive voice, and creates a framework for staying in relationship."

Talbert, a veteran of the U.S. civil rights movement, also has long campaigned to change the church's stance on homosexuality and has been an outspoken advocate for clergy officiating at same-gender unions. He comes from a jurisdiction where many United Methodists share his views.

Delegates to the Western Jurisdiction's meeting in 2012 asked Talbert to oversee a Western Jurisdiction


grassroots movement to act as if the stance against homosexuality in the *Book of Discipline* – ¶161F – "does not exist." Talbert calls the movement "biblical obedience."

After the resolution was announced, Talbert praised God and expressed his gratitude to Wenner, Wallace-Padgett and others involved "for their openness, honesty and fairness in the process."

However, he added, "our primary mission of 'making disciples...' is still before us. At some point our church must choose its best preferred future."

"Out of the depth of my heart, I believe embracing biblical obedience offers the best way forward for maximizing its potential for growth and full inclusion," he said. "I pray that we will remain open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, as we continue the struggle to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ."

Wallace-Padgett noted that the hoped-for outcome of any complaint in The United Methodist Church is a just resolution.

"Over the course of the past year Bishop Talbert, Bishop Wenner and I, along with support persons each of us invited to the table, have worked diligently to find such a resolution," she said. "My hope and prayer is that our reaching this resolution will be helpful to the church at large." 

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

Persecution of Christians reaches historic levels

From imprisonment to torture to beheadings, more Christians worldwide live in fear for their lives than at any time in the modern era.

That's the message from Open Doors USA, which released its annual World Watch List on Jan. 7. Christian persecution reached historic levels in 2014, with approximately 100 million Christians around the world facing possible dire consequences for merely practicing their religion, according to the report. If current trends persist, many believe 2015 could be even worse.

"In regions where Christians are being persecuted as central targets, the trends and issues we track are expanding," said David Curry, president of Open Doors, a nonprofit that aids persecuted Christians in the most oppressive countries and ranks nations based on the severity of persecution.


North Korea tops Open Doors' list as the worst oppressor of Christians for the 13th consecutive year, but the list is dominated by African and Middle Eastern nations. Iraq, which experienced the mass displacement of Christians from its northern region, ranked third. Syria was listed fourth, due to the reign of ISIS in that war-torn region. Nigeria ranked 10th, due in part to the more than 1,000 Christians murdered or kidnapped by terrorist groups such as Boko Haram. Also included in the top 10 are Somalia, Afghanistan, Sudan, Iran, Pakistan and Eritrea.

Even though some Christian-majority nations are experiencing unprecedented levels of discrimination and oppression, Curry said Muslim extremists are the primary drivers of Christian persecution worldwide. This is the case in 40 of the 50 nations on this year's list.

Todd Nettleton, a spokesman for Voice of the Martyrs, a global ministry serving persecuted Christians in oppressed nations, agreed with Curry that Muslim extremism is the main source of Christian oppression.

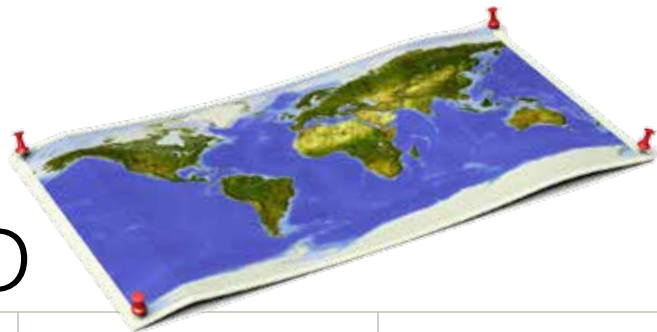
"Wherever there is growing Islamic radicalism, there is growing persecution of Christians," he said. "Even where moderate Islamic states offer peace – and that is rare – they almost never have freedom to practice their faith and are often marked for death."

Nina Shea, director of the Center for Religious Freedom at the Hudson Institute, said Islamic extremism is not just rampant in rogue terror groups, but also in the governments of nations such as Saudi Arabia (No. 12 on the list) and Egypt (No. 23). This has foreign policy implications, which Shea said has contributed to a failure on the part of the Obama administration to address the calamity adequately.

Regardless, Open Doors leaders say the situation is reaching crisis levels: Christianity faces possible extinction in the Middle East and persecution is growing at alarming rates in Asia and Africa. 

-Religion News Service

Religious news from around the NATION & WORLD



Bishop Job, who helped people deal with death, dead at 86

By Kathy Gilbert

"I have no anxiety about my own death. ... I don't know what that's going to be like, but I have some idea that it will be good because this life is good," said retired Bishop Rueben P. Job after the publication of his book,

Living Fully, Dying Well, in 2006. Job died at home Jan. 3 at 86 after a long struggle with heart disease. He was a bishop, pastor, author and friend who was not afraid of death and wanted the church to be better prepared to help people deal with the experience of dying. In talking about his book, Job offered the best words of comfort about his own death.

"I have no fears at all about death. I think everyone has some apprehension about pain, and in the past, perhaps we did not treat pain well. I think now that's not true anymore. And even when we did not, I think the body itself begins to close off the functions so that the pain itself is lessened.

"I always felt for a long time as a pastor that it was more difficult for the people who watched a loved one die than it was for the loved one who was dying. But now I think the medical profession handles pain so much better than they did in the past, so that is not so much a big factor.

"I have no anxiety about my own death. I just had a stent put in, and for a person of my age – with a third of my heart function remaining – it's a risky venture. But I went into that operating room with the same confidence that I lie down in my bed every night. Had I awakened in another world, I don't believe I would have been surprised or afraid."

Dr. Randy Fullerton,

Job's son-in-law, said the bishop "was ready to die." Fullerton said the bishop had been under hospice care and died peacefully at his Brentwood home, surrounded by his family. He is survived by his widow, Beverly Ellerbeck Job, four children and seven grandchildren. His children are Debbie, Philip and David Job, and Ann Job Fullerton.

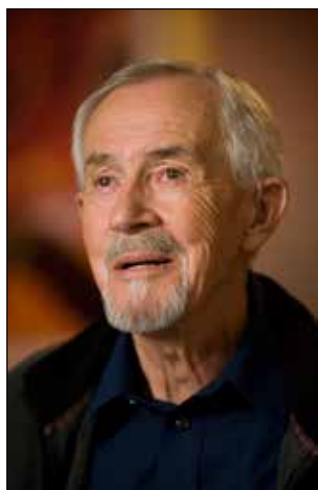
Job leaves behind a legacy of more than 20 books including, *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living* published in 2007 that has sold more than 300,000 copies worldwide.

"Thousands of churches and hundreds of thousands of individuals reclaimed the general rules of Do No Harm, Do Good and Stay in Love with God through the little brown book. He put the most foundational and profound into 10 words that we could understand and then spent a lifetime trying to achieve," said Susan Salley, associate publisher of ministry resources at the United Methodist Publishing House. Salley worked with Job on *Living Fully, Dying Well* and *Three Simple Rules* in addition to other books published by Abingdon Press.

Job's commitment to spirituality was recognized by Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, in 2010. The Rueben P. Job Endowed Chair in Spiritual Formation was one of the first chairs in spiritual formation among Protestant seminaries. Garrett Evangelical is



Religious news from around the NATION & WORLD



one of 13 United Methodist schools of theology.

Upon hearing that gifts and commitments for the endowed chair had reached the \$2 million goal in 2013, Job said, "Because Christian spirituality has been at the center of my ministry for 60 years, the faithful prayers and actions of many bring great hope and joy to me today and will do so for multitudes in the years to come. My prayers of petition have turned to prayers of thanksgiving."

Job was born Feb. 7, 1928, in Jamestown, North Dakota. He was raised on a farm and worked alongside his father until he received a "clear and urgent call" to ministry. He was licensed to preach in 1952, and ordained in the Dakota Conference of the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1957. The EUB and the Methodist Church merged in 1968 to form The United Methodist Church.

Job served as an Air Force chaplain from 1960

to '62. He was also a district superintendent in South Dakota and pastor of churches in North and South Dakota.

Job was elected to the episcopacy and assigned to the Iowa conference in 1984. He was world editor of *The Upper Room* devotional magazine and a staff member of the United Methodist Board of Discipleship. He served as president of United Methodist Communications Commission in 1988.

During the 1985-88 quadrennium, he chaired the Hymnal Revision Committee culminating in the adoption of a new hymnal at the denomination's 1988 General Conference. Mary Brooke Casad, former top executive of the denomination's Connectional Table, worked on the committee with Job and remembers him introducing the hymnal to the worldwide conference.

"The image he set before us was that of an icon," she said. "This hymnal would be a 'window to God' reflecting God's glory and goodness. I give thanks for his personal witness to me; he has indeed been a 'window to God' for my faith journey and for that I am eternally grateful."

The United Methodist Hymnal is used by 97 percent of United Methodist congregations. 🍀

-Kathy Gilbert is a reporter for United Methodist News Service.

The UMC at a Crossroads: A Conversation

A Gathering for Laity & Clergy
(sponsored by the Evangelical Fellowship of Virginia)

Saturday, March 7, 2015, 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Woodlake United Methodist Church
15640 Hampton Park Drive, Chesterfield, VA 23832

Featured speakers:




Rev. Tom Berlin
Pastor, Floris UMC



Rev. Rob Renfro
Woodlands UMC, Texas, and
President of Good News

To register or for more information, go to www.efumcva.org.
Cost: \$25 includes lunch (\$30 after February 28)

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EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY



WHAT THE CHURCH CAN LEARN FROM DISNEY

By Rich Birch

Over the years, I've had the privilege of taking a bunch of family vacations at Disney World in Orlando. I love it ... partly because it's such a fun place to visit and partly because I find leadership lessons everywhere I look. My family recently spent a week there and it got me thinking about how it's changed over the years and what those changes can teach me as I lead at

my church. Disney is a big organization attempting to stay on the cutting edge of impacting culture. Here are a few of their changes that jumped out at me:

PERSONALIZED TECHNOLOGY:

In 2013, Disney rolled out a series of products under the banner of *MyMagic+*. This technology personalizes your vacation experience. You can book your ride times from home, before you even leave for vacation. A few of the newer rides create automatic digital souvenirs, which blend music, professional video and images of you on the ride. It's reported that Disney has spent \$1 billion to provide this sort of personalization to its guests.

How are you leveraging data to make a better experience for people? What if we celebrated people's birthdays and anniversaries as they arrived at our services each week? What if we generated name tags for people with a scan of their license plates as they pulled into our parking lots?

MORE INTIMATE EXPERIENCES:

Disney recently finished the Magic Kingdom's largest expansion in its history, with a completely redone Fantasyland. In the middle of many great new attractions is Enchanted Tales with Belle. It's an almost 30-minute small group experience where you are face to face with Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* while kids re-enact the story. Don't miss this ... Disney could have invested in a new show, ride or theater experience ... but they chose to structure an incredibly intimate time where families interact directly with the story.

Growing churches need to fight the urge to move people into larger and larger crowds. How can you break your ministry into smaller communities to give intimate growth experiences? Where is the "mid-sized" community being developed at your church ... between the large gatherings and small groups?



GLOBAL AND LOCAL EXPANSION:

I asked a long-time “cast member” at Disney World when the slowest time of the year is now. He commented that Disney has done a lot of global advertising to draw in guests from around the world, so there really isn’t a slow time of year due to varying vacation schedules. At the same time, Disney World just opened a massive parking garage called Disney Springs as part of a new expansion project targeted at Central Florida residents and people vacationing at other Orlando attractions.

How is your church reaching out to “hard to acquire” first-time guests and more readily available “low-hanging fruit”? What’s a series of Sunday services that you could do to draw in a different demographic than you normally reach? (I love what The Meeting House is doing with some daring new ground in its series entitled ISIS, Islam, and Jesus ... a great example of trying something new!) Who is the core community your church is perfectly tuned to reach? How can you reach more of those folks?

INCREASED RIDEABILITY:

Disney changes some of its rides so they are different every time you ride them. The Star Tours ride at Hollywood Studios has 54 potential variations in the story line. The Toy Story Mania ride is essentially a 3D video game that you travel through ... begging guests to ride it again to increase their scores. The new Test Track ride at Epcot allows guests to design their own futuristic car and then see how it performs ... again implicitly inviting guests to come back and tweak their designs. These changes are a far cry from the “It’s a Small World” generation of rides where guests experienced the same thing for decades.

Are you offering variety in your experiences so that people have a sense of anticipation when they come to your church? What is the balance between offering a repeatable experience that you can do with excellence and fresh experiences that keep people engaged? How are you adding elements of surprise and delight into what your church does to keep people interested and coming back?

THE EXPERIENCE BEFORE THE EXPERIENCE:

Let’s be honest ... a big part of a Disney World vacation is standing in line and waiting for something to happen. It’s a pretty ingenious business model really! I’ve noticed that throughout the park Disney attempts to make these “waiting” experiences as elegant and entertaining as possible. At the classic Haunted Mansion there are a bunch of new interactive elements designed to entertain and delight guests before they enter the ride. The queue for the brand new Seven Dwarfs Mine Train ride includes games and all kinds of fun stuff to do while you wait for your turn on the train. Even the Pinocchio Village Haus restaurant has menus with really cool animations to look like they are built by a cuckoo clock maker! All of these

small sub-experiences help you enjoy the experience before the experience ... whether that’s a \$100 million roller coaster or a \$10 chicken burger!

Where do people “wait” at your church? How can you add to those experiences to make them great? Can you get a volunteer to stand with folks as they check in their kids ... maybe handing the kids treats or stickers? What happens before your service as people arrive? Could you do something in the foyer to welcome people and build anticipation? 🍌

-the Rev. Rich Birch serves as Operations Pastor at Liquid Church in New Jersey and writes at www.unseminary.com.

Devotions from International Lesson Series

LIVING THE WORD



The Rev. Brandon Robbins is pastor of IGNITE UMC, a new faith community in Norfolk near Old Dominion University. He attended James Madison University, where he received a Bachelor of Arts, and Duke Divinity School, where he received an MDiv. Robbins was ordained as an Elder in Full Connection in 2011. He serves on the Board of Ordained Ministry and the Bishop's Vital Congregations Steering team. He and his wife, LeeAnn, have a three-month-old daughter, Emma.

Feb. 1, 2015

Hunger Pangs and Public Displays
Matthew 6:16-18

Lent begins in just over two weeks. For many Christians, this is a time when we sacrifice something we love in our lives in order to, among other things, deepen our understanding of Christ's own sacrifice. For 40 days, we abstain from chocolate, caffeine and hopefully, in my case this year, diaper changing.

What many of us don't realize, though, is that our Lenten routine is actually a modification of an ancient practice called fasting. Today, fasting finds itself among some of the least practiced of spiritual disciplines. But in Jesus' day, it was quite routine. Fasting was so prevalent, in fact, that Jesus found it necessary to teach his followers how to faithfully observe this practice.

During his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "When you fast, brush your hair and wash your face. Then you won't look like you are fasting to people, but only your Father who is present in that secret place" (Matthew 6:17-18, CEB). In an age when fasting was common, Jesus had to remind his disciples that they were doing this not for social gains, but spiritual ones.

Unfortunately, I find that I still have to be reminded of this in my own fasting practices. After a lifetime of Lents deprived of desserts and soda, a few years ago I decided to spend one day each week completely fasting from food and drink. Now, for those who know me, this was clearly no small task. I love food. My wife and I spent the majority of our Italian honeymoon scouting out restaurants. Forget the leaning tower of Pisa, we wanted hot Italian pizza! So an entire day without food seemed excruciating. And it was. But here's the problem: I let everyone know it.

Every Monday, I'd find myself telling church members how difficult the fast was. I'd describe my hunger pangs, my dreams of food that would disappear once it passed my lips. Eventually, though, I remembered Jesus' words and realized how my act of outward suffering was actually depriving me of an experience of inner renewal. I had been given an opportunity each week to glimpse the pain many in our world experience each day, to pray about it, ponder it, and respond to it. But I had missed that chance. For I was so focused on receiving empathy that I neglected to give it.

Does this resemble any of your past Lenten experiences? Have you been so focused on outward show that you've missed an inner movement? This Lent, may you heed Jesus' words, focusing on what God sees, rather than what others see. And, in doing so, may you see what blessings may come from a season of surrender and sacrifice.

Feb. 8, 2015

Your Friendly Neighborhood Samaritan
Luke 10:25-37

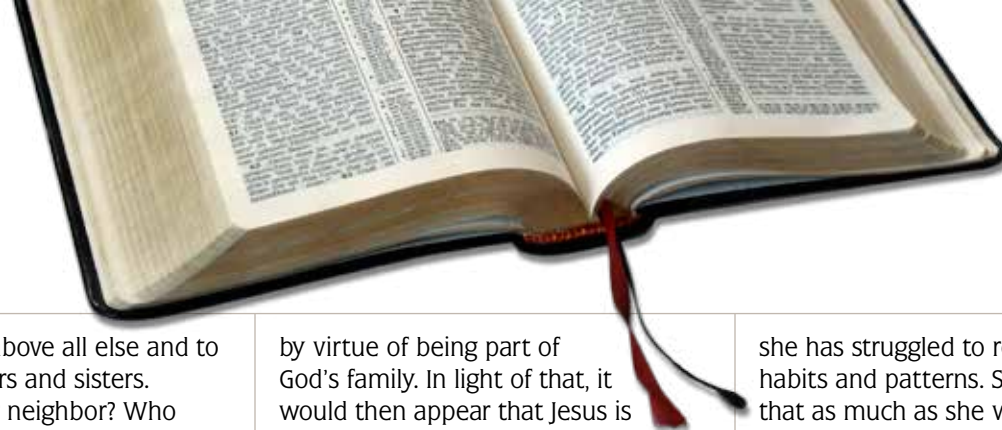
"How do I get to heaven?" As a pastor, that is perhaps the root of almost every question I'm asked. Can I drink alcohol? How much money am I supposed to give to the church? What would I do for a Klondike bar? All of these questions stem from this fundamental desire to know, "what gets me into heaven?"

One day Jesus is asked that question. An expert in the Jewish law asks him, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25, NRSV). Notice he doesn't ask what must I do to earn eternal life. He asks how he might inherit it. This implies that eternal life is something received by virtue of being part of a family, God's family. Which then begs the question, "how does one get into God's family?"

Jesus responds by asking this expert in the law what the law says. The man responds by essentially saying, "love God with everything you've got, and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus agrees with this response, but the man still isn't satisfied. He wants to know who his neighbor his. Eternal life is important business and he wants specific answers.

Jesus' reply, however, is surprising. He tells the story of a man who is beaten within a breath of his life on the side of a road. Two separate religious leaders notice his condition, but pass by for fear of being made ritually unclean. A Samaritan, however, a man for whom the lawyer would have held great contempt, not only stops to help the man, he also pays for his entire recovery at a nearby inn.

Jesus is showing him that one's neighbor has nothing to do with geographic proximity or social affinity, as most would assume. To love one's neighbor is to treat all with kindness and compassion. This is what it means to be the family of



God: to love God above all else and to treat all as brothers and sisters.

So who is your neighbor? Who are the people around you that God is asking you to love? Who has God shown you that is too weak to even cry for help? And how are you helping them? Do you treat them as brothers and sisters, an equal part of God's family? Or do you pass them by with eyes averted and arms folded?

Jesus reminds us that we can never fully love God our Father until we love our brothers and sisters. This week, may you extend love to all who you may pass along your journeys.

Feb. 15, 2015

The Family We Forget

Matthew 25:31-46

As a church planter, I encounter a lot of people who are new to Christianity. And the other day, one of them asked me a question troubling them that reminded me of my own crisis of faith in college. She said, "why is it that if a person dies without knowing about Jesus, they are the ones who are punished by not getting eternal life?" While there was no easy answer to give her to such a difficult question, I did find a scripture that helped.

Jesus tells his disciples that at the end of the age, he will return to judge the world. Those who care for the poor, the sick and all others in need will inherit the kingdom and receive eternal life. Those who neglect to do this will be eternally punished. For Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me... [and] just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me" (Matthew 25:40, 45, NRSV).

Notice what Jesus does here: he refers to those in need as his family. In last week's scripture, we saw Jesus refer to eternal life as a gift that comes

by virtue of being part of God's family. In light of that, it would then appear that Jesus is suggesting that to become part of God's family, one must love all of God's family (especially those Jesus calls his brothers and sisters) as if they were one's own family. In other words, it is impossible to love Jesus without loving those in need. In fact, to withhold such love is to withhold it from Jesus himself, thus abandoning one's place and inheritance in the family of God.

This leads us back to the question I received from this new Christian. Jesus seems to imply that his judgment is reserved not for the person who failed to receive Christ into his/her life, but for the person who failed to offer Him. For in failing to offer Christ and his love to one in need, they failed to love Christ himself.

The scary question is, "what if this is true?" What if Jesus isn't being cryptic or symbolic with his words? What if he is actually suggesting that his judgment is based not on what we do but what we fail to do? How would that change the way we live?

May your eyes be opened to those in need around you. May you recognize that they are Christ's presence in your midst. And may you never fail to love them as you would Christ.

Feb. 22, 2015

Lenten armor

Ephesians 6:10-20

The Christian life is not easy. And it is not always enjoyable. It can feel like every step of growth that we experience in our relationship with Jesus is followed by a doubly defeating fall.

I experienced this the other day with a member of our Launch Team (the committed group of people who are hoping to get IGNITE off the ground). We had the joy of leading her to Christ last summer, but since then

she has struggled to resist her old habits and patterns. She told me that as much as she wants to live differently now that she is a Christian, in many ways it seems even more difficult than before.


Perhaps this is why Paul encourages us to "put on God's armor so that you can make a stand against the tricks of the devil" (Eph. 6:11, CEB). He knows that the hard part isn't deciding to follow Jesus as Lord. The hard part is not giving up.

The armor to which he is referring is comprised of truth, righteousness, faith, and the Word of God - items that protect not the body but the spirit. We gain such armor through worship, discipleship, and spiritual disciplines. They are tools absolutely essential to a developing relationship with Christ.

Unfortunately, it often seems that the older our faith gets, the less we feel the need for such tools. We become comfortable, complacent. Our urgency has diminished, leaving us to believe we have fully matured, or we are too satisfied to care.

Yet, it is exactly in this moment that we need God's armor the most. It is at this precise moment that we must "pray in the spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication" (6:18). We must seek prayers and offer prayers. We must beseech Christ's strength with every breath. For it is in this moment that we are the most vulnerable, on the cusp of what we learned last week may be one of the sins Jesus despises most: apathy.

Has your faith become stale? Do you no longer feel the passion and drive you once did?

As we begin this season of Lent, may this be a season of renewal. May you remember why you began following Christ, and pursue Him with passion. 

CLERGY & DIACONAL



DEATHS



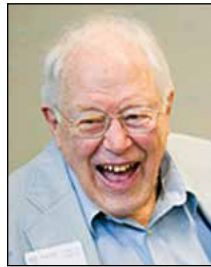
The Rev. Richard Hilton "Rik" Davis, of North Chesterfield, 55, died Jan. 5, 2015. As a teen, he developed interests in music,

particularly the guitar, and in science fiction, especially "Star Trek," passions he never lost. While a student at Virginia Tech, Davis discovered he had talent in television production. Following graduation, he remained in Blacksburg for a time and worked in television production for the university. He moved on to similar work for the College of William and Mary before settling into a career in the U.S. Senate television studio in Washington, D.C. After a time, he felt God's call to the ministry and resumed his studies at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington. He entered full-time ministry as an associate at Aldersgate UMC in Alexandria in 1998. He subsequently served at Enon UMC in Mechanicsville and Forest Grove UMC in Ashland. He was serving Huguenot UMC in the Richmond District when the effects of a brain stem tumor forced him to take medical leave in 2012. Ever the communicator, Rik created a blog to update concerned friends on his condition and, at one point during this period, created and led an online Bible study using social media. He is survived by his wife of 25 years, Ann, and children Graham, Conna and Amelia. A memorial service was held at Centenary UMC.



The Rev. James Lytton Duley, 88, of Lake of the Woods, died Dec. 19, 2014. He is survived by his wife, Barbara, sons Gary, Brian and Jason

and daughters Jamie Morley and Beth Morlock; nine grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. He was a retired United Methodist minister, having served several churches in the Virginia Conference: Sudley, Aldersgate (Arlington), Messiah, Epworth and First UMC Charlottesville. He also served as District Superintendent of the Roanoke District. He retired in 1988, and then served Liberty UMC in Bealton.



The Rev. Dr. William "Bill" Mallard Jr., 87, died Dec. 23, 2014. Mallard was professor emeritus at Candler School of Theology in Atlanta and has

been called one of Candler's best-loved professors. He was born in New York City but moved to Richmond in the eighth grade, where he attended Reveille UMC and Thomas Jefferson High. He then attended Randolph-Macon College in Ashland and Duke University in Durham, N.C., where he graduated with a Ph.D. in Religion in 1956. He began his teaching career at Sweet Briar College. In 1957 he was ordained elder in the Virginia Conference and appointed to teach church history at Candler. When he retired in 2000 after 43 years, he was the longest serving faculty member in the school's history, a mark that still stands. He is also the only Candler faculty member to win Emory University's Thomas Jefferson Award. Mallard was also awarded the Distinguished Teaching Award and the school's Centennial Medal. The Bill Mallard Lay Theology Institute at Candler is named in his honor. "Bill was a formative presence in the lives of thousands of people, spanning several generations," wrote his colleague, Dr. David Pacini. "Perhaps his contribution to Candler and its students is illustrated most clearly by the course he co-taught with Roberta Bondi, History of Christian Thought:

Origins to Medieval Period. Their practice of opening each class with a full-throated rendition of 'Give Me that Old Time Religion' won the hearts of many a Candler student who otherwise might not have found the intricacies of early Christian church history anywhere near as enticing as they did." Mallard is survived by his wife of 53 years, Gatra, three adult children and five grandchildren. His life was celebrated at Glenn UMC in Decatur, where he had been a member since 1963, as well as a frequent preacher and teacher of adult Sunday school classes, and a forceful presence as song leader at the Christmas Eve service.



Rev. Matthew "Matt" Nelson, of Parksley, died Jan. 3, 2015. He began his ministry in 1976 in the Western New York Conference before coming

to the Virginia Conference and serving Round Hill, McGaheysville, Wesley Chapel in Petersburg, Grace in Parksley, Monumental, Parrish Court, Essex-King and Queen, and Mount Pleasant. After his retirement in 2004 he continued to serve the Eastern Shore District as interim at Melfa UMC, Hallwood UMC and on call to fill pulpits when there was a need. He is survived by his wife, Donna. Funeral services were held at Grace UMC.



The Rev. William G. Price, 93, of Chesterfield, died Dec. 17, 2014. He served in the U.S. Navy in WWII as a medic/pharmacist mate at the invasion on D-Day. He

was minister for more than 60 years, serving United Methodist churches throughout Virginia. Price began his

ministerial career in 1948 at Fishersville. He went on to serve Churchville, White Stone, Grottoes, Villa Heights, Buckroe Beach, Marquis Memorial, Dunn Loring, Culmore and Belmont in Richmond. He retired in 1986. He is survived by two children, Debbie Sweatt and William Price Jr., and two grandchildren. A memorial service was held at Mount Pisgah UMC, Midlothian.

Orville Hargis Burton Sr., 82, of Atlantic, died Dec. 10, 2014. He was the father of the **Rev. O.H. Burton Jr.**, pastor of Benns UMC, York River District.

Laurence E. "Larry" Capen, of Richmond, father of conference Communications staff member **Brenda Capen**, died Jan. 5, 2015.

Allie Freeman, 91, died Dec. 19, 2014. She was the mother of **the Rev. Bill Freeman**, Dunns Chapel UMC, Richmond District.

William Howard "Bill" Maddox, 62, of Hallwood, died Jan. 8, 2015. He was the brother of **the Rev. James R. Maddox**, retired Virginia Conference clergy.

Jean Mahon of Virginia Beach, widow of **the Rev. William Mahon**, died Dec. 30, 2014.

Mary Elizabeth Payne, mother of our former **Bishop Charlene Kammerer**, died Jan. 9, 2015, in Winter Garden, Fla.

James Rigg, father of **the Rev. Ed Rigg** of the Main Street UMC, Farmville District, died Jan. 5, 2015.

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FROM THE BISHOP



It is more blessed to give

Friends,

May the grace and peace of our risen Lord be with you. I pray 2015 will be filled with God's many blessings and joy throughout the year.

This month the Cabinet will begin making appointments of pastors to churches. I think this responsibility is one of the most important tasks given to the bishop and Cabinet. The appointment of pastors makes a profound impact on the churches, its members, clergy and their families. The Cabinet has been attempting to be more open and to rely even more on the guidance of the Holy Spirit who leads our churches today.

To prepare myself for this important work, my practice has been to schedule a personal retreat time before the February Cabinet meeting. This year I am planning to do this again. Many of our DSs will join me in preparing for this task by participating in a period of

prayer and thoughtful discernment. I will be deeply grateful if you will support our task with your prayers.

I will continue to work to spread the culture of prayer to our churches. We will have a 2015 Bishop's Convocation on Prayer on March 21 at Trinity UMC in Richmond. The Rev. Sue Nilson Kibbey of the West Ohio Conference has been invited to be our speaker for this convocation. She will speak about "Breakthrough Prayer."

Also we have set May 24 as the date for a conference-wide day of prayer for the renewal and revival of our churches. I want you to mark these days on your calendar.

I cannot express thanks enough to the many churches who have joined the Covenant for Spiritual Disciplines. I am also extremely grateful for the many sisters and brothers who made a commitment to dedicate one hour daily to their spiritual disciplines. Your prayers are the foundation for our new future, and I believe your prayers will make a difference in our churches and in the world. I deeply appreciate your commitment to prayer, and I encourage you to continue to pray until we see the revival and renewal that God will send to our churches.

The theme for the *Advocate* this month is short-term mission work. I thank God that the Virginia Conference has been strong in short-term missions. Many churches are taking part in this, and many people in many parts of the world have been touched by our mission efforts. Many houses have been built, and many people have experienced God's love through our short-term mission work.

But one of the most important fruits of our short-term mission work is that we too experience God's love and blessings. We not only help people in need, but also we are helped by them. We truly experience what our Lord said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

I still remember a person's story

who experienced God's transforming grace through a short-term mission trip. After he retired from work and moved to a suburban area of Washington, D.C., he started coming to the church I served. At first, he was not supportive of short-term mission work. He used to say that he could not understand the reasons for going to foreign countries for short-term mission work when there are so many needs in the Washington, D.C., area.

One year a friend invited him to join a mission trip to Mexico. He joined the team, but his purpose was different. He wanted to uncover the flaws of short-term mission projects and then propose that the church change its short-term mission programs. When he arrived at the mission site, he was given the task of washing the hair of the people who were the recipients of a hair dressing service. One day his heart was touched by the love of God. He could not control the tears streaming from his eyes and he felt God's love in his heart.

That mission trip changed his life. He became a strong supporter of short-term mission work and took part in many mission trips. He went on to serve as a mid-term lay missionary when the church started a building project on a mission site in Mexico. The seeds of mission work he planted are now growing and bearing much fruit in Mexico.

In our mission work, we think we help people in need, but in many cases we are helped by the people living in the mission field. When we share, God blesses us in many ways. As your Bishop, I commend all of you who are engaged in mission work and pray the Lord will continue to use you and the Virginia Conference for God's Kingdom. 🍷

With sincere appreciation,

ONE LAST WORD

St. Luke's UMC presents check for nearly \$28,000 to Imagine No Malaria



St. Luke pastors Doug and Clara Gestwick present Bishop Cho with a check from the church for \$27,742.64 for Imagine No Malaria. Also pictured at right are Maria Maxwell, the conference coordinator for Imagine No Malaria, and the conference director for the Center of Justice and Missional Excellence, the Rev. Glenn Rowley.

St. Luke's UMC in Yorktown began its journey with Imagine No Malaria last summer through the church's Vacation Bible School program. Led by Josie Turner, director of Children's Ministries, St. Luke's kicked off its Imagine No Malaria mission by challenging the boys and girls to a little friendly competition. Each day for the duration of the week-long VBS, the children were tasked to bring in their change to help save a life. At the end of the day all the change was counted and a winner emerged. A summary of the day's lesson and a reminder to bring in their change (also a shout-out to who was in the lead) was sent home at the end of each day. The kids raised \$1,000.16 for Imagine No Malaria, saving 100 lives! Kids saving kids... it just doesn't get any better than that!

Later in the summer, the church held its annual Community Outreach Carnival, once again highlighting Imagine No Malaria. The Reverends Doug and Clara Gestwick, along with Turner and Youth Director Ike Akagha, each took a turn in a dunk tank to raise money for Imagine No Malaria. Rev. Doug Gestwick received the largest amount of dunk donations and had to sit in the dunk tank for an additional 30 minutes. The

event raised \$1,073.48.

The Rev. Clara Gestwick shared that not only were her congregation members generous, they were kind: Knowing how much she dislikes being cold, they filled her dunk tank with warm water!

To end the year, St. Luke's UMC challenged every member and friend of the church to bring on Christmas Eve an amount equal to what they spent on their family for Christmas. The offering collected was close to \$45,000! Then that offering was divided in two; one-half was set aside for the church's "Miracle Fund" and will be used to help families or individuals in need of a miracle. The other half goes to Imagine No Malaria.

St. Luke's membership will exceed 2,000 in 2015, the Gestwicks said. In Pastor Doug's words, "In essence, we have doubled the size of Christ's church here in Yorktown by saving lives elsewhere! This is one of the true beauties of being United Methodist: we are a globally connected church."

In final total, St. Luke's UMC turned over a check for \$27,742.64 to the Virginia Conference Imagine No Malaria Initiative. Truly, "Every Life Saved A Life!" 🐦

-Maria Maxwell

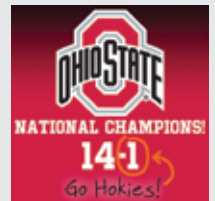


Tweets heard 'round the conference

Larry Davies

@sowseeds

Since the VT Hokies are the only team to beat Ohio State this season... Does that make us Co-Champions? Just saying!!



Andrew Hudgins @andrew_hudgins

The worst part about Ohio State winning the championship last night is all the Hokie fans asking if that makes them co-champs.

Lauren Lobenhofer @Chafinhofer

This is the perfect weather for watching football in the basement and pretending there's no such thing as weather.

Lindsey Baynham @LMBaynham

Little girl plugging her ears during the preschool singing @FairfaxUMC #icant

Thomas G. James @ThomasGJames

Is it really "commercial free" music when @SIRIUSXM plays their own advertisements every five minutes? #Holly #falseadvertisement

Megan Harrison @MeganHarrison23

Somebody go skiing this weekend with me and hang out in the lodge and go tubing and drink cocoa

Hannah Lambert @hannahba-

nana004 Me and my warm mist humidifier are about to be bffs #iwillnot-letthiscoldwin

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