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Virginia United Methodist

# Advocate

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January 2012

Boulevard United  
Methodist Church

# ACCESSIBILITY

*Are our doors open for all?*

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

— Virginia Conference Vision Statement

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## Breaking down the barriers



Neill Caldwell  
Editor

**M**y first church as a clergy spouse had been built in the early 1950s, a time when planners didn't give much, if any, thought to people with disabilities. There were so many levels and steps, not just to get into the building but also once you were inside. It seemed like you couldn't take 10 strides in that facility without having to go up or down a step or two, and for no good reason. Having long had an interest in architecture, I thought it was madness. Plus, my knees were really starting to bother me then, so I noticed this problem in a real and tangible way.

We pushed and prodded for some handicapped-accessible changes in that church, and it finally happened a couple of years ago. On a visit back to the church, we got a tour of the new elevator and entrance plaza that had been added to the building in a way that you could not tell it was a recent addition. It was a fantastic success story: after more than 50 years of hardship for people with mobility issues, that beautiful church is now much more user-friendly for everyone!

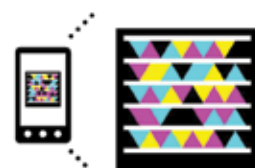
That United Methodist church is not an unusual case, unfortunately. Many of our facilities have been around a long time, constructed in a time of quality work and craftsmanship, but with no regard to the notion of accessibility. Congregations *want* to allow everyone to come to church and participate with their ministries, but you know, those ramps cost money. And have you priced elevators lately? Whew-eee! Fuhgeddaboutit!

The Americans with Disabilities Act changed the way we treat people with physical needs by forcing us to make changes. Signed into law in 1990 by President George H.W. Bush, it defines disability as "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity," and provides standards for accessibility in all parts of daily life. The law relates to existing facilities in that "failure to remove barriers" or provide an alternative option to the barrier is considered a violation.

Fortunately, our denomination stands solidly for the rights of persons with disabilities in our *Social Principles* and our actions. We have a very active Task Force on Disabilities Ministries. And the General Board of Global Ministries provides grant money to churches that still need to make changes to their buildings.

Of course, accessibility issues don't all relate to people using walkers or wheelchairs. There are issues with those who are visually or hearing impaired, people who have mental issues and other physical challenges. If we really want to make (and develop) disciples, if we really want to offer full worship and ministry participation to all, we have to make changes in the way we do church, and that includes keeping all of these issues in mind when we plan worship, Christian education, music, mission and, yes, our facilities.

*Neill Caldwell*



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# Why can't attitudes of acceptance and inclusivity pervade in God's house?

After attending a contemporary worship service one summer Sunday morning, I tracked down the Worship Arts leader and inquired as to what time practice was held for the choir/band. Brought up in the traditional service, I had determined to take a leave of absence from the chancel choir to help out the contemporary service which was just beginning in our church.

I was told, after a palpable pause, that the stage was very crowded with chairs, not to mention many wires connecting various pieces of sound equipment. At this point in the conversation, I interrupted and said that I was familiar with these concerns, having been in choir since I was 4 years old and public speaking for most of my life. I stated I would sit or stand wherever I was placed, so as to alleviate any concerns as to my tripping over people or equipment. I also inquired as to what solution he had in mind to prevent everyone else from accidentally tripping over the wiring. I was then informed that there was not any room for me on the stage.

I was so taken aback that I was speechless. How dare he play God? How insensitive! At this juncture, we were mercifully interrupted by another individual.

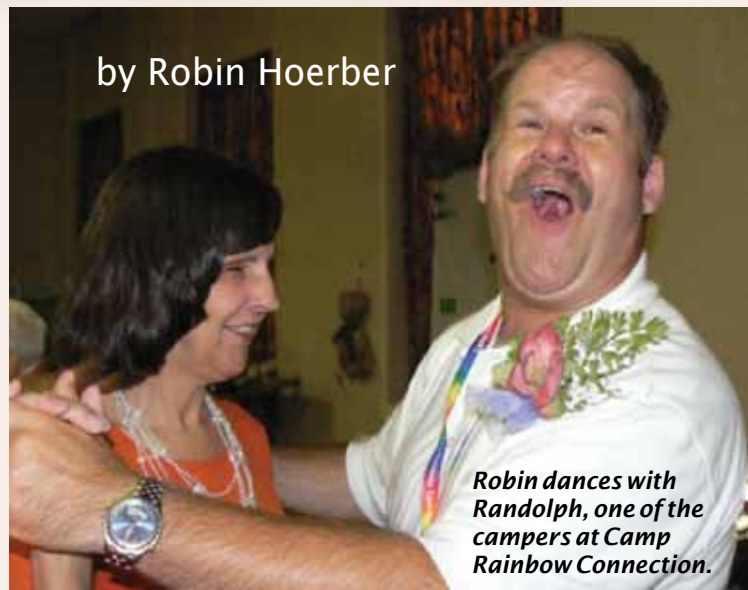
On the way home, my husband, who only overheard a portion of the conversation, was incensed further by having heard folks with intellectual disabilities being referred to as "broken." Thank God Almighty I am broken, because God can be glorified in my weakness. Complicating the situation even further was that I had to sit in church for the next several weeks and listen in silence while folks recruited for members of the praise team.

Such treatment was not new to me. While attending elementary school, the cruelty of my classmates carried over into Sunday school since there was only one Protestant church and one Catholic church in our rural upstate New Jersey town. My parents dealt with the backlash by having the family attend the Protestant church in the next town, which was not a whole lot better. However, my parents taught me from a very young age that the best way to change uninformed thinking was to provide the truth and to promote inclusion (unheard of in those days) whether it be through conversation, written materials, or action. I was not about to get kicked out of God's house and would participate wherever I felt led.

I made my peace with this fellow and provided materials on how to better communicate with persons having any type of disabilities: sensory, mental or physical. Peace and friendship were restored.

The following fall, I returned to the traditional worship service and the chancel choir, where I am a fully participating member. The choir director welcomed me back after my absence and to this very day provides me hymn numbers via e-mail. A dear friend in choir reads me the words to the music so that I may fully participate. God bless her for her kindness and patience. I have *The United Methodist Hymnal* and *The Faith We Sing* in Braille, loose-leaf, so I just pull out the appropriate numbers for services each week and then reinsert

by Robin Hoerber



**Robin dances with Randolph, one of the campers at Camp Rainbow Connection.**

them until needed again. I also have a version of the Bible in Braille so am able to participate in Sunday school class. When we choose study books, attempts are made to try and obtain the book on CD so that I may read lessons independently. My husband does so much to help me that I just didn't want him to have to take on reading if available in an accessible format.

I have been embraced by my church. I am an officer (spiritual growth) in United Methodist Women and am a member of a women's circle, served on the Leadership Development Committee as well as two full terms on Staff Parish. I am fully trained as a Stephen Minister, where most of the training materials are available in Braille or on tape. Materials were sent to me electronically so that I could fully participate since my computer has a speech program. (One of my pet peeves is that the *Disciple Bible Study* series is not available in Braille, though I have completed *Disciple 1-4* with my husband reading the material onto cassette tape.) In 1998, I went on my Walk to Emmaus, at which time an effort was made to make the weekend as accessible as possible. I have since teamed seven or eight times and I am pleased to say that the purple worship book is now available in Braille. I have served as a camper's buddy for several years at Camp Rainbow Connection, where I am embraced by both the campers and staff.

Long ago I concluded that the church was really a man-made institution, not a whole lot different from other "worldly" organizations. I continue to make a difference, educating one person at a time. We are all God's children and should be welcome at God's house. As long as I have breath, I will continue to use my God-given abilities to advocate for those who do not believe they have a voice. We are ALL God's children, blessed with unique gifts. The only folks we can change in some situations are ourselves. God will make all right in God's time. □

— Robin Hoerber is a member of Mount Pisgah UMC, Richmond District.



**Tizzy signs the words to a song during Annual Conference.**

# Dealing with hearing loss can mean a lonely world

by  
Tizzy von Trapp  
Walker

*The cheerful birds chirp,  
The happy children laugh,  
The beautiful music plays,  
Of this, I hear nothing.*

*My world is a lonely one,  
My eyes are also my ears.  
Oh, if I could only hear again,  
What a wonderful world it would be.*

— Circa 1966  
by Elizabeth von Trapp



These words (at right) were written for a science project I entered into the Dominican Academy Science Fair more than 46 years ago. I was in the eighth grade and had already experienced a lifetime of verbal abuse and ostracism from my small world of school and home. My journey as an advocate for persons with hearing loss began with this very science project, which won honorable mention at the regional level and a trip to the State of Massachusetts Science Fair.

Throughout the ensuing years, my life journey has taken many twists and turns, but two things remained constant: my hearing continued to get worse while my faith and love for Jesus only grew stronger. I literally fell in love with Jesus when my papa told me the Christmas story one Advent when I was not quite 6: “It is Advent, the time you need to prepare your heart for the baby Jesus!” With these few simple words, I fell head over heels in love with Jesus. (The truth be known, Papa had me with the word “baby!”)

My love for Jesus and worship was nurtured from elementary school all the way through my college graduation in 1974 under the capable guidance of many nuns and priests! I have been a member of the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church for 20 years; as a layperson for eight years and as clergy for 12.

It was not until my entry into seminary in 1996, however, that my hearing challenges became an almost insurmountable barrier. Naïvely, I had assumed there would be a greater degree of compassion among colleagues,

professors and clergy. Sadly, this proved to be an erroneous assumption. To be fair, however, I am an unusually high-functioning, profoundly hard-of-hearing person. Consequently, it is believed that I present myself with a greater loss to garner special attention. This was particularly true my first year as a pastor. It has been an uphill and painful battle to prove otherwise.

The denomination’s “Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.” advertising campaign is an affront to any person with disabilities. The creators of this campaign clearly were not familiar with the daily challenges all persons of disabilities face just to be minimally included in the life of the church. As former chairperson of the conference Commission on Disabilities, Southeastern Jurisdiction representative to the national Committee of Ministry to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and current member of the United Methodist Task Force on Disabilities, here are only a few of the things I have personally and repeatedly experienced: the inability to fully participate in small groups, classes and meetings due to the lack of a functioning assistive listening system (ALS); frustration and anger from my colleagues as I boldly request what I need to be fully included; intolerance with the use of closed captioning; and lack of closed captioning on most of the materials produced by the United Methodist Publishing House.

But there has been great kindness on the part of the technology staff of our

Virginia Conference as they consistently and diligently work to enhance my overall hearing experience at all conference events. The five congregations I have served in my two appointments have also gone far above and beyond my expectations with the patience, love and support they have given to me specifically with my hearing challenge as their pastor. Yes, there have been times of crippling frustration and tears; but there also have been times of great laughter and good natured teasing.

As you read this, I have begun a new journey in the world of hearing loss. I have already mentioned the Advent Season marks the beginning of my faith journey as a child. This past Advent, I received an early Christmas gift from the Christ Child. On Dec. 21, I received a cochlear implant at the University of Virginia Medical Center and am currently in my period of adjustment and transition. Many of you have been praying for me and I continue to covet your prayers.

I leave you with my favorite Scripture verses: “God will bring to completion the good work begun in you on the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6); and “What was meant for evil, God has used for good.” (Genesis 50:20) □

— The Rev. Elizabeth “Tizzy” von Trapp Walker  
is pastor of the Richmond Charge  
(Calvary, Hopewell and Oakland UMCs),  
Fredericksburg District.



# Some churches try to do the right thing, but still miss the mark

by Sylvia Massey

I travel to many of the churches in my district and across the Virginia Conference due to my involvement with United Methodist Women, as a clergy spouse, member of the Commission on Disabilities, and a variety of other reasons. I have encountered churches that build an outside ramp but forget to raise the floor of the porch so there is still a step that does not allow me to enter. Then there was the church that built a ramp, but forgot to make sure the door was wide enough. I could get to the door, but not through it. There was also the church that had a hall connecting fellowship hall to sanctuary. The hall was one step lower than both the fellowship hall and sanctuary. They had a portable ramp that had to be moved from one doorway to the other once the person had gotten to the hall floor level.

Elevator problems include one that goes to three levels of the church so there is a door on each side of the elevator. Unfortunately the buttons for the floor are on the frame of the elevator, which means sometimes it is behind you. Anyone with range of mo-

tion problems or who sits in a wheelchair cannot reach them. (Also, if there is a gate that has been installed in a church, the gate is not automatic, meaning you need someone to close the gate behind you in the elevator.) I have had the problem with an elevator that does not land even with the floor of the building making it difficult or impossible to get out of the elevator. Plus, this is a hazard for those with vision challenges and anyone on a walker, using crutches or a cane.

As for restrooms, there are a variety of issues. Of course, there are churches in our district where I have to go outside and around part of the building to get from sanctuary to the fellowship hall or the church where

the fellowship hall is accessible, but the restroom is either up or down a few steps. And restrooms with the door opening into the restroom make it impossible to close the door once a wheelchair is in the room. Many restrooms are marked handicapped, are large enough for the wheelchair, and I can close the door. Yet they have only one grab bar and a low commode, not an accessible height commode.

The final issue is seating in the sanctuary. Wheelchair users are many times shown a place in the very back or all the way up front. Not everyone wants to sit up front, and who wants to have no choice but the back row? □

— Sylvia Massie's husband, Ray, serves Bluff Point Charge, Fredericksburg District.

## Building ramps for persons with disabilities is a ministry in itself

**B**uilding handicapped-accessible ramps for community members has many benefits, including training youths and adults as potential United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) team members, energizing a cooperative parish or congregation, and increasing disability awareness as volunteers interact with ramp recipients.

Many current ramp teams trace their ministry to "Takin' it to the Streets," annual blitz building events sponsored by the Louisiana Conference UMVIM leaders four to 12 years ago. VIM coordinator the Rev. Larry Norman partnered with local churches and solicited volunteers from throughout the conference for weekend events which ended with Sunday worship. In the second year 300 workers built 33 ramps in New Orleans. The conference no longer holds the blitz, but at least eight regional groups continue to build ramps.

Debbie Wade coordinates R.A.M.P. (Reaching Accessibility for all Methodist Persons/Places) for the North Alabama Conference. Recipients do not have to be United Methodist. In addition to ramps, churches and individuals have been assisted to install bathrooms, chairlifts and elevators. Some projects need only funding, while volunteers help build others.

Further guidance regarding ramp specifications is available through <[www.access-board.gov](http://www.access-board.gov)>. Check the Web site for step-by-step guidelines for starting a ramp building ministry. □



**Volunteers help build an accessible ramp for people with handicapping conditions.**

# Accessibility projects revitalize local churches

Meeting accessibility standards for even basic physical access is often a large challenge, especially for smaller membership congregations with limited resources. A challenge, yes, but not an impossible one to meet.

In my 17 years as a pastor in the Virginia Conference, several of my churches have built handicapped-accessible ramps, improved parsonage access and even installed a fully-accessible restroom. We have raised the necessary funds and received financial support for district, conference and denominational resources.

As part of this process, I have seen how accepting the challenge and completion of a major renovation project has benefited the congregation in often unexpected ways. I offer two examples:

At Mount Pleasant-Lamps UMC in Winchester, our facility featured an indoor ramp into the basement Social Hall – but no restrooms on that floor. One restroom on the sanctuary level had been renovated for accessibility – but there were several steps into the sanctuary. As some of our more senior members began to contemplate their own future needs, it was decided to address this issue ASAP. The final result was a beautiful brick and concrete ramp that nearly everyone uses on a regular basis.

by Charles Townsend

We had a grand opening celebration. The congregation felt good about what they had done. Since then, they have renovated the Social Hall and installed a new sound and audiovisual system in the sanctuary. They have moved on from being re-active to becoming pro-active about their future.

At Rest UMC in the Winchester District, where I now serve, we began with rebuilding a poorly-designed lower entry into the sanctuary. We enlarged the pad, widened the doorway as much as we could, given the church's brick construction, and installed a weatherproof steel door. This has greatly benefited several of our members who had found the steps up to the main doorway a difficult climb. One gentleman, an Army veteran with several health issues, was sporadically attending worship services. He is now able to maneuver his electric wheelchair without damaging the door or his chair.

There previously was no stairway-free restroom anywhere in our facility. Our second project was to build a sufficiently large, comfortable and fully accessible restroom in a corner of the vestibule. The total costs for these two projects were prohibitive. We could not have done both without the assistance of various United Methodist resources. The Winchester District has been especially helpful.

Again, as in my first example, the benefits are many. Rest UMC continues to struggle to meet her budget and attendance goals. But the congregation is learning to embrace the challenges of preparing for the future. We have worked hard together to raise money. We believe in ourselves and in God's plans for us far more than before. We have additional projects to address, such as improving our sound system for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. God will supply our needs as we meet the needs of others, as time and funds permit.

And yes, we are growing again, in part as a direct result of our accessibility projects. The contractor who guided us through these projects liked what he saw in us. He joined Rest UMC this spring on Profession of Faith. He and several members of his family are among our most regular attendees.

Is there more to be done? Absolutely! Open hearts and minds must have doors that are open to enable people with disabilities. We at Rest UMC wish to encourage other congregations that, however small their active membership may be, are re-building God's church to better reach out to the community of Christ. □

*—The Rev. Charles Townsend serves the North Frederick Charge, Winchester District, and is a member of the conference Commission on Disabilities.*

## Disabilities task force will present petitions to 2012 General Conference

The Long-Range Committee of the United Methodist (UM) Task Force on Disability Ministries has written four petitions to submit to the 2012 General Conference. They express a desire to help make all United Methodist people more aware of those with disabilities and that such persons be welcomed into all levels of our church.

The four petitions concern the following key points:

- Making the UM Task Force on Disability Ministries a standing committee;
- Making changes to the *Discipline* paragraphs related to Clergy Incapacity Leave, renaming it Clergy Medical Leave and offering more advocacy and accommodations;
- Making Disability Awareness Sunday a Sunday with a special offering;
- Resolving that each conference, in the quadrennium from 2013–2017, has a theme on disability awareness at one of its annual conference sessions.

For more information consult the task force's page at <[www.umdisministries.org](http://www.umdisministries.org)>. □



*A person in a wheelchair sees steps as a barrier for entering this church. Is your local church prepared to welcome those who are physically challenged?*



# Heart Havens' homes help special needs adults have meaningful lives

Heart Havens empowers adults with intellectual disabilities to live and thrive in a safe and nurturing environment. This is accomplished by providing handicapped-accessible homes, helping individuals explore their dreams and make individual choices, connecting the residents to their community and advocating for them. We work together with the individual, their family and their community to provide a meaningful life.

The Virginia United Methodist Conference established Heart Havens in 1996 in response to a parent's question: "Where will my child live when I am gone?" Today in Virginia more than 17,000 adults with intellectual disabilities live with parents over the age of 60. Heart Havens continues to offer solutions to that original question.

Heart Havens' earliest homes were purchased and adapted to fit the people who would live there. In 2002, Heart Havens began building homes that would support individuals with multiple disabilities; these homes were built from the ground up. With each new home, improvements on functionality and accessibility have been made. The homes are outfitted with seamless entry for individuals who use wheelchairs. They can easily access sinks and showers, as well as wide hallways that light up as they move during the night.

At Heart Havens, accessibility is so much more than just meeting an individual's physical needs. Heart Havens follows a person-centered approach to care by understanding and addressing the concerns and needs of individuals and their families. Our goal is to ensure that each resident is empowered and has the opportunity to voice his or her preferences and lead a lifestyle based on individual needs and desires.

Some individuals communicate in a way we may not understand, but it's important to try. We all strive to be heard, to be noticed. A smile, a nod, or an invitation to sit makes us feel welcome in the community; it makes us a part of the community and the community accessible to all. If we can open up ourselves to the uniqueness of each individual, our world becomes richer as we come to know all God's children.

Staff supports ensure each resident has the opportunity to develop a plan to explore his or her own dreams. The staff meets persons where they are and helps them get to where they want to go by offering them the necessary supports. Families play an integral role by teaching staff about their loved ones and then entrusting them to Heart Havens' care.

Heart Havens' staff seeks ways to integrate individuals into their community. Some of the opportunities available include softball, Scouting, theater groups, Special Olympics, bowling and church organizations. But there is more to community access than activities. Communities need to be welcoming and understand that we are each different with separate skills and abilities.

- For several years Dan, John and Stephen from the Winchester home have belonged to a bell chimers group at Shenandoah University. Student volunteers help with music and preparing the group for its annual holiday concert. Friendships have been forged, connections have been formed, and the university has made itself accessible to the entire community.
- Tommy lives in Heart Havens' Colonial Beach home. Tommy works at Goodwill

by Pat Maher



**Heart Havens resident Tommy in his home in Colonial Beach.**



**Charles next to a Heart Havens display.**

and Food Lion where he gets to know his customers and they know him. Once a month on his day off he goes to the local barber for a haircut and to sit around talking with the other men. He bowls and goes fishing on the weekends.

- Charles lives in the Marybeth Graff home in Varina, but he is often out and about in the community. He holds a job at Omnicare during the week where he has made friends, but that doesn't interfere with all his activities. He also is a great spokesperson for Heart Havens, frequently speaking at United Methodist churches across the Virginia Conference. He knows everyone and never forgets a name or a face.

These men and women have made a life of their own choosing in their communities. Now we have an opportunity to open our homes and hearts to all our neighbors. The

first step is to be accessible: reciprocate, be inclusive, be a neighbor, be a friend. We can make our communities more accepting of individuals with disabilities by seeing Christ in all persons and welcoming them, as we would Christ.

February is Heart Havens Month. Representatives from Heart Havens are available to speak at your church. Heart Havens residents also may be able to join local church services and share their personal stories. For more information about Heart Havens, or to schedule a speaker, call Heart Havens at (804) 237-6097 or visit their Web site at: <[www.hearthavens.org](http://www.hearthavens.org)>. (For related article, see pg. 15 of this *Advocate*.) □

— Pat Maehr is director of Development at Heart Havens, a conference-supported agency which provides group homes for adults with special needs.

# Should your congregation start a disability ministry?

Disability ministries are vital not only to The United Methodist Church, but to ALL Christians. They combine mission, evangelism, justice ministry and, most importantly, following the example of Christ.

One of the major aspects of Jesus' earthly ministry was his interaction with and outreach to people with disabilities. Time and time again, he offered invitations for the deaf, lame, diseased and blind to enter the Kingdom of God by the gift of salvation.

Jesus also performed many mighty acts in these people's lives by healing them. We who are Christians should follow Christ's example. Just as he made ministry with people with disabilities a big part of his ministry, so should we! Statistics also show why Christians should care about disability ministries.

- There are more than 1.4 million people with disabilities living in Virginia. (This does not include those persons living in institutions or those under the age of 5.)
- Eighty percent of all marriages end in divorce once a disability enters the family.
- Depression is 15 percent to 20 percent higher among those who are chronically ill or disabled. (However, the significance of one's faith has shown to lower the risk of depressive symptoms and aid in better handling a stressful medical event.)
- Various studies report that physical illness or uncontrollable physical pain are major factors in up to 70 percent

of suicides; and more than 50 percent of these suicidal patients were under 35 years of age.

- Currently, the nationwide statistic is that one in every 150 births will become a child with autism.
- More than 50 percent of people with disabilities do not attend church. This is an opportunity to display your commitment to social justice and evangelism.
- *The Book of Discipline* states that United Methodists are to minister to people with disabilities. Every local church is to have an annual Disability Awareness Sunday and complete an annual Accessibility Audit.
- The number one reason why people with disabilities stay away from church, according to *That All May Worship*, is that they are not made to feel welcome! It is attitudinal barriers – not architectural barriers – that tend to keep them away.

The 2008 *Discipline* requires each conference to establish a committee on disability concerns. It further requires that this committee will include "persons with physical disabilities and persons with mental disabilities." The *Discipline* also requires the observance of a Disability Awareness Sunday annually in each conference, stating that "Disability Awareness Sunday calls the Church to celebrate the gifts and graces of persons with disabilities and calls the Church and society to full inclusion of persons with disabilities in the community." □

– Debbie Wade, North Alabama Conference Disability Ministries

## Disability Awareness Sunday is first Sunday in February

The 1996 General Conference of The United Methodist Church voted to create Disability Awareness Sunday. The 2008 *Discipline* states in ¶265.4:

*Disability Awareness Sunday shall be observed annually on a date to be determined by the annual conference. Disability Awareness Sunday calls the Church to celebrate the gifts and graces of persons with disabilities and calls the Church and society to full inclusion of persons with disabilities in the community.*

In the Virginia Conference, Disability Awareness Sunday is the first Sunday in February – without a special offering. This special Sunday gives every congregation the opportunity to challenge hospitality and inclusion of all persons into the full life of the

church. This can be a time when persons with disabilities can offer their gifts and graces to the congregation and to God as participants, liturgists and leaders in this celebration.

As you celebrate this special Sunday, let it be an opportunity for the congregation to launch or extend its hospitality to persons with disabilities. The trustees and other groups should involve members of the congregation along with their sisters and brothers with disabilities in identifying and offering solutions to physical, architectural, communication and attitudinal barriers. Develop specific plans and strategies to eliminate those barriers so that your congregation might be fully hospitable to all of God's people.

Each year, the conference Com-

mission on Disabilities produces a packet of worship materials that can be incorporated into local churches' Order of Worship or fellowship times. For a copy of the packet, visit the conference Web site, <[www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org)>, under "Ministries" then "Disabilities." □

FEBRUARY 2012 <a href="http://www.freebookmarks calendars.com">www.freebookmarks calendars.com</a>						
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
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5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
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26	27	28	29			



# Making God's house more accessible

The television commercials were disturbing: Traditional-looking churches barring or physically ejecting racial and ethnic minorities, gay couples – and people with disabilities. One tag line was “Jesus didn’t turn people away. Neither do we.” The national campaign, which aired several years ago, was sponsored by the United Church of Christ. “We included people with physical disabilities in these commercials – in a wheelchair or with a walker – as an extension of the call and hope that churches would be intentionally inclusive of ‘all the people,’” said the Rev. Gregg Brekke, a spokesman for the denomination.

Instead, the imagery provoked grumbling from some denominations because of its implied critique of other church traditions. But at least when it came to the physically handicapped, the criticism had more than a grain of truth. Churches, synagogues, mosques and temples are places where people with disabilities might not expect to feel excluded, isolated or patronized. Yet that has often been the norm. For years congregations have effectively excluded the disabled from worship – by steps, narrow doorways, and straitened attitudes – or segregated them in “special” services. Houses of worship (except those with more than 15 employees) were excluded from the 1992 Americans with Disabilities Act, which, among other things, bars discrimination against people with physical or intellectual disabilities – including access and architectural barriers – in public accommodations and transportation.

The U.S. Census in 2000 counted 54 million disabled individuals – one in six Americans – and that number is probably growing. Wounded Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans are swelling this population. Thanks to neonatal care and technology advances, at-risk infants with severe disabilities now survive into adulthood. Most significantly, the baby boomer generation is

by Mark Pinsky



**Wounded veterans such as these from Iraq and Afghanistan are adding to the numbers of persons needing faith communities that will break down not only physical barriers, but also barriers of unexamined attitudes.**

aging and getting ill. Many of them may develop disabilities but still want to pray at houses of worship.

There are challenges to accessibility and inclusion, even for people with the best intentions. The elderly and people with disabilities provide uncomfortable reminders of life’s fragility and of death. Those with mental disabilities can distract during solemn moments. Religious people generally want to be sincere, welcoming and open, but, like everyone else, they often lack the experience to respond the right way. And money is an issue, especially for smaller, cash-strapped congregations.

But there are also some potential benefits for congregations that are willing to make the investment in architecture and attitude in order to become more welcoming. Mainline congregations with declining memberships, for example, would have much to gain. More families with a disabled member would attend religious services, experts say, if congregations would make efforts to open their buildings and programs. Older people tend to attend services in greater numbers than the young.

The good news is that some churches, synagogues, mosques and temples are already getting ready for the com-

ing influx of the disabled, tapping technology and simple thoughtfulness to reach out in creative ways to this faith-hungry community. It takes more than just automatic door openers, large-print Bibles and improved signage to make a congregation disability-friendly. In recent years – sometimes under pressure – numerous denominations also have established national outreach networks to make their congregations accessible. Through groups like Joni Eareckson’s Joni and Friends Disability Center, evangelical megachurches have become increasingly involved in this effort.

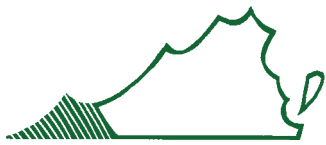
“Of all the barriers to full participation and inclusion, the barrier of unexamined attitudes is the most difficult to address,”

said Ginny Thornburgh, director of the American Association of People with Disabilities’ Interfaith Initiative. Its goal, she says, is “to bring the powerful and prophetic voice of the faith community to the 21st-century disability agenda,” and to involve all religious communities. “There are no barriers to God’s love,” Thornburgh says. “There should be no barriers in God’s house.” □

– Mark Pinsky, a longtime religion writer, wrote a book about congregations that welcome people with disabilities, published by the Alban Institute. This article was originally published in The Wall Street Journal in 2009.

## Think your local church's Web site is accessible?

Just as many congregations and businesses work to make their physical facilities accessible to people with disabilities, they also strive to make their online presence accessible. And just as physical accessibility takes some care, and reaches beyond the obvious, so does online accessibility. For a list of suggestions on how to make your Web site more user-friendly and for an extensive list of resources related to The United Methodist Church’s ministry with those who have disabilities, visit <[www.umdabilityministries.org](http://www.umdabilityministries.org)>. □



# Virginia

## Conference moves to Connectional Ministry 'centers for excellence' model

*"Resourcing of leadership must become the primary focus of the conference as new and existing faith communities are empowered to witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ."*

— All Things New: Fruitful and Multiplying  
Virginia Annual Conference, June 2008



**W**ith the approval of "All Things New," leadership development became the primary focus of the Virginia Conference in alignment with the conference vision statement: "We envision faith communities where all God's people are welcomed at table, nurtured and transformed to be Christ to others in the world."

In the three years that have followed, conference staff, boards and agencies have structured and aligned their ministries toward this goal. Some of the fruit of this focus have been the formation of the 5 Talent Academy, a Young Adult Leadership Initiative that resulted in VocationCARE for congregations seeking to cultivate a culture of call, an Associate Pastors Initiative, a mid-size church initiative that has provided training for pastoral leadership, a small church leadership initiative that will develop intentional leadership resourcing for laity and clergy, a Cross-Cultural/Cross-Racial Appointment Task Force that will provide training for congregations, and 2012 ministry gatherings for African-American and Latino clergy.

As of Jan. 1, the next step of alignment with the conference vision has been taken with the formation of four Virginia Conference Connectional Ministry Centers:

**Center for Clergy Excellence**, overseen by Beth Downs, director of Clergy Excellence;

**Center for Congregational Excellence**, overseen by Mark Ogren, director of Congregational Excellence;

**Center for Missional Excellence**, overseen by Glenn Rowley, director of Justice and Missional Excellence;

**Center for Lay Leadership Excellence**, overseen by Martha Stokes, director of Inclusivity and Lay Leadership Excellence.

The purpose of the Connectional Ministry Centers is to provide resourcing of leadership that will develop principled Christian disciples who are grounded in Wesleyan tradition and theology as they answer their call to ministry in the church and world.

The concept of the Connectional Ministry Centers is to create a vision of excellence for the Virginia Conference founded upon mission-based decision-making and clear priorities for fruitfulness and multiplication. This vision will be achieved through a new emphasis on accountability and the possibility for short-term participation in collaborative efforts and initiatives that are outside of the normal conference board programming structure.

The core values of the Connectional Ministry Centers are grounded in Wesleyan theological concepts that expect fruitfulness as an outcome of faithful discipleship. Central to the core values of these centers is a more nimble organizational structure that will be undergirded by a willingness to engage in new directions for ministry. The centers will strive for excellence, honesty, and integrity based on Philipians 4:8 – *"Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever*

*is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."*

Implementation of the Connectional Ministry Centers will be facilitated by the Office of Connectional Ministries. Initiatives that emerge outside the board/agency ministry process will be approved by the Common Table for Church Vitality with staffing responsibilities being assigned by the director of Connectional Ministries. Center directors will collaborate on initiatives with the director of Ministries with Young People. In addition, the director of Communications and conference commissions on Inclusivity will resource the centers.

Persons who have suggestions for leadership initiatives that can help Virginia Conference congregations to grow in fruitfulness as our conference continues to answer the invitation of "All Things New," can contact Marc Brown at <MarcBrown@vaumc.org>. □

— The Rev. Marc Brown,  
director of Connectional Ministries

### January closings announced for conference offices

Offices in the Virginia United Methodist Center in Glen Allen will be closed Monday, Jan. 2, for the New Year's holiday and Monday, Jan. 16, in observance of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday.



# 'Meeting Your Vital Congregation Goals' training events scheduled for spring



**T**he Virginia Conference Cabinet and Connectional Ministries staff will be coordinating Vital Congregations training events in April and May for churches averaging up to 150 in weekly worship attendance.

Workshop topics will be directly tied to the key areas for goal-planning in the Vital Congregations ministry plan: **Worship:** "Understanding generational expectations in worship" and "Ways to increase worship attendance"; **Professions of Faith:** "Increasing professions of faith in your congregation" and "Planning effective confirmation programs" (to include the new *Credo* confirmation resources from Cokesbury); **Small Groups:** "Starting and sustaining small groups" and "Creating small groups for children and youth"; **Mission:** "Building relationships with your community through mission" and "Following apportionment dollars from the offering plate into the world"; and **Leadership:** "Assessing your church's potential for vital ministry" and "Best practices of church leadership" (mentoring, running a meeting, navigating change, administration, etc.).

Bishop Charlene Kammerer and the Cabinet have asked local church leaders to set goals in these areas. The Vital Congregations movement has grown out of the "Call to Action" report on The United Methodist Church issued in early 2011.

These training events are being offered in addition to the regularly scheduled district training day events. Additional training opportunities of this type were one of the recommendations of the Small Church Leadership Initiative Task Force, based upon feedback received in surveys of clergy and local church Lay Leaders. The workshops are planned to be offered again in the fall to those districts that could not schedule dates in the spring.

The schedule for Saturday events will be registration from 8:30 to 9 a.m., followed by a short welcome and introductory session, and two rounds of workshops (with a break in between) ending by 12:30 p.m. Workshop leaders will make themselves available until 1 p.m. for questions from individual church leaders. The

schedule for the Sunday sessions will be the same, but with a different start time. Registration will begin at 1:30 p.m. and the workshops will end at 5:30 p.m.

Confirmed dates for spring training events are:

**April 14** – Lynchburg District (Timberlake UMC)

**April 15** – Danville District (First UMC, Martinsville)

**April 21** – Staunton District (location TBA)

**April 22** – Harrisonburg and Winchester Districts (Woodstock UMC)

**May 12** – Alexandria and Arlington Districts (St. Matthew's UMC)

**May 19** – Elizabeth River District (location TBA)

Additional dates may be added.

For more information, contact Martha Stokes at 1-800-768-6040, ext. 154 or (804) 521-1154 or <marthastokes@vaumc.org>. You can also visit the Vital Congregations Web site, <www.umvitalcongregations.org>. □

## State employees have unique opportunity to support prison chaplaincy

**C**haplain Service Prison Ministry of Virginia, Inc., is the official agency that provides chaplains to Virginia's state prisons and juvenile correctional centers. Virginia is unique in that its prison chaplains are not state employees. They are not compensated by the state (i.e., no federal or state taxpayer monies are utilized) and they receive no state benefits such as health insurance or retirement.

Chaplains serve as prison pastors and religious program coordinators in 31 state adult prisons and at three state juvenile correctional centers. Chaplains conduct worship services, teach, counsel, and coordinate the many volunteers who assist in ministering to the male, female and youthful offenders incarcerated in the state prison system.

Chaplains are supported by denominations, churches, foundations and individuals, as well as by some of the profits from the Department of Corrections' Commissary Fund.

Chaplain Service is a registered charity with the Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign (CVC). The CVC code for Chaplain Service is 3002.

This presents a unique opportunity for state employees to support prison ministry and to help change lives and ensure safer communities. State employees are able to give a one-time donation to Chaplain Service or to give to the ministry throughout the year via payroll deduction.

Churches or individuals that would like to contribute to this unique ministry can obtain additional information by calling (804) 358-7650, or by visiting the Web site <www.chaplainservice.org>. Promotional pamphlets, a promotional DVD and presenters are available for your church, group or organization upon request. □

– Randy Myers, vice president of Chaplain Service Prison Ministry of Virginia, Inc.

# Derrick Parson joins conference staff as director of Ministries with Young People

**T**he Rev. Derrick Parson started as the new conference Director of Ministries with Young People effective Jan. 1.

Parson is an elder in the Virginia Conference who has been active in district and conference youth ministry. His appointments have included being associate pastor of Ramsey Memorial UMC (2000-2003), director of the Wesley Foundation at James Madison University (2003-2008), and most recently as pastor of Asbury Memorial UMC in Chesterfield (2008-2011).

Prior to entering ordained ministry, Parson served as a sergeant in the United States Marine Corps, and served in Iraq during Operation Desert Storm. He also was part of security details for U.S. Embassies in Germany and Mali, West Africa.

Parson has a Master of Divinity and a Master of Arts in Christian Education from Union Theological Seminary in Richmond.

Parson's goal for ministries with young people is to develop leaders



Parson

who will be productive in their churches, homes, and community at large as followers of Jesus. "I am grateful to the Lord in allowing me to live out my passion and creativity with our very own youth across the Virginia Conference," he says.

He has worked with the A. Purnell Bailey pre-ministerial

program at Randolph-Macon College and has been a speaker for conference youth events. He also serves on the board for the Pace Campus Ministry at Virginia Commonwealth University.

The Rev. Marc Brown, director of Connectional Ministries, said that "Derrick will continue the tradition of excellence in ministry with young people exemplified in the Virginia Conference. He will help us move forward in the direction of leadership development that has been the focus of our conference's ministry since the approval of 'All Things New.'" □

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# 20th annual United Methodist Day at General Assembly coming up Feb. 2

**T**he 20th annual United Methodist Day at the General Assembly of Virginia will take place Feb. 2. The annual event is sponsored by the conference Board of Church and Society and United Methodist Women.

Participants will gather for breakfast at Bon Air UMC at 7 a.m., then be transported to the State Capitol in buses and vans. There will be opportunities to sit in on committee meetings and talk to state lawmakers. At noon there will be a joint session of the Senate and House.

After a return to Bon Air for lunch, participants will hear from Bishop Charlene Kammerer and Jim Winkler, General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society and a lay member of the Virginia Conference. "We have asked both speakers to share how our faith informs our social justice advocacy," said event coordinator Natalie May. "How are United Methodists uniquely called to serve in this way?"

The afternoon session also will include a group discussion about ways that participants can bring the day back to their congregations.

The primary legislative issue this year will be human trafficking, "an issue near and dear to the hearts of Virginia Conference United Methodist Women," May said.

Organizers also have invited Gov. Bob McDonnell to meet with the group at the Capitol in the morning or join them for breakfast at Bon Air UMC.

May said that there also are some minor logistical changes from last year. "We will not be mailing confirmation letters this year; we will send confirmation e-mails instead," she said. "We ask that everyone include an e-mail address on their registration form [available at right] so that we can keep them updated about events, legislative issues and any changes due to inclement weather, etc. Also, lunches will not be selected on the registration form this year. We promise that there will be several delicious lunch selections similar to years past. And gluten-free lunches will be available."

May asked persons to register online and to do so early. "We are limited to 300 participants and are expecting a big turnout this year."

May also urged participants to take advantage of the resources available through the Virginia Interfaith Center

for Public Policy, <[www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org](http://www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org)>, which include legislative briefs and updates, links to Web sites such as Richmond Sunlight that will provide up-to-the-minute updates of legislative issues, and a YouTube video on successful visits with legislators. □



## UNITED METHODIST DAY AT GENERAL ASSEMBLY *Thursday, February 2, 2012*

7 a.m. **Registration and breakfast** at Bon Air UMC, 1645 Buford Rd., Richmond.

8 a.m. **Load buses and travel** to Capitol grounds.

8:30 a.m. **You may attend committee meetings** and visit the offices of your legislators and take a Capitol tour. **Contact your legislators' Richmond offices in advance to set up an appointment/group meeting.**

11:30 a.m. **Gathering** for large group meeting with Legislators.

Noon. **Joint Session** of Senate & House.

12:45 p.m. **Return to Bon Air** for lunch and remarks from guest speakers.

3:30 p.m. **Adjourn.**

**For Directions to Bon Air UMC:** visit <[www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org)>, scroll down to "Upcoming Events" and click on "United Methodist Day at General Assembly." We encourage car/van pooling. Early arrival is recommended.

**Hotel Reservations:** Rooms for Feb. 1 are available at the Hyatt Place Richmond/Arboretum Hotel, 201 Arboretum Place, Richmond. Please refer to "United Methodist Day" when calling (804) 560-1566 for reservations. **(Deadline: Jan. 13.)**

**For more information,** contact Natalie May at (804) 320-8524 or <[nbmay@verizon.net](mailto:nbmay@verizon.net)>

*This event is presented by the Virginia Conference Legislative Network and cosponsored by the Virginia Conference Board of Church & Society and the Virginia Conference United Methodist Women.*

**Online Registration is encouraged!**

### REGISTRATION FORM:

Clip and mail this registration form (feel free to photocopy) or download a brochure and form or register online from the Web at [www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org), click on "Events" and then the date.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Church \_\_\_\_\_

District \_\_\_\_\_

Age: ☐ 21 and under ☐ 36-45 ☐ 56-65

☐ 22-35 ☐ 46-55 ☐ over 65

Special Needs: \_\_\_\_\_

I am [check all that apply]: ☐ UMW ☐ UMM ☐ BCS member ☐ other

Is this your first time attending UM Day? ☐ Yes ☐ No

**Early bird registration and payment of \$20/person must be received by Jan. 20, 2012. (\$30 after that date)**  
(Includes packet, hot breakfast, snack, lunch, free parking at church, and transportation to & from Capitol grounds.)

If sending registration for a group, please mail one check together with a completed registration form for each person.

**Make checks payable to**  
**"Virginia United Methodist Conference" (earmarked "UM Day")**  
**and mail, along with registration form, to:**  
Jennifer Kennedy, 12945 Crescent Park Dr. #303.,  
Midlothian, VA 23114

**No refunds after Jan. 20, 2012.**

# 'Exploration' is an inspiration for Virginia young people

If I could sum up the Exploration 2011 experience with one word, it would be "inspiring."

I had the privilege and honor of representing the Virginia Conference at this national event, held in St. Louis this year, geared toward young people (ages 18-26) who are exploring a call to ministry. I was inspired in so many ways. Here are just a few:

I was inspired by the sheer number of people. There were more than 600 young adults wrestling with a call to ministry in its many forms, as an ordained elder, ordained deacon or dedicated lay person. There were also a couple hundred adults like myself: representatives from general boards and agencies, seminaries, and conferences around the country along with military chaplains and campus ministers.

I was inspired by the Rev. Adam Hamilton, who issued a challenge to these young people to reach the next generation for Christ. His authenticity and humility were refreshing, and his faith in

by Jessica Fuller

the message of The United Methodist Church and its unique ability to reach people was encouraging. He compared a typewriter to an iPad and said that most of our churches look more like a typewriter, and emphasized that we need young leaders to teach us to be the church for today's age.

I was inspired by the presence of Bishop Robert Schnase. He was not one of our key speakers, but he led us in Communion and was present throughout the entire event. He made himself available to meet with, talk to, and answer questions of the participants. I was also inspired by the enthusiasm of Bishop Robert Hayes, who told the young people that the thing that pulled them there was not going to let them go, emphasizing that God does not call the equipped but equips the called.

I was inspired by the words of a young provisional elder, the Rev. Shalom Agatrap, who asked the question, "Have you ever mistaken the beginning of something for the end?" She shared

her story and the good news that God's Spirit met us there, and will be with us when we return home, and to remember that this is just the beginning!

I was inspired by the worship leadership of Mark Miller and his band. The music was fresh and new and yet so familiar as we sang many adapted hymns. I was inspired by the sacred space created for prayer.

I was inspired and reinvigorated in my own relationship with God and commitment to following my call to ministry. I attended Exploration in Chicago as a college student nine years ago. It was so humbling to be on the other side of things, to reflect on where God has moved in my life over the years, and to recognize the need for consistent and intentional connection to God and the evolving call in my life.

Most of all, I was inspired by the young people I met, and the stories of how God is moving in their lives and placing a unique call in their lives. □

— The Rev. Jessica Fuller is youth minister at Crozet UMC, Charlottesville District.



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# Heart Havens adds second home in Lynchburg, 13th overall

In October, a crew of volunteers under the supervision of Tom Gerdy converted a cement slab to a framed house in one day in Lynchburg. A massive crane dropped roof trusses into place as the sun began to set. The next day builders put up vinyl siding, roofing, windows and framed the front porch on the second Heart Havens home (see related article on pg. 7) in Lynchburg.

A committee chaired by Joe Wills, a former member of the Heart Havens Board of Directors, was formed to coordinate the process leading up to the build. Many of the committee members coordinated the fundraising and execution of the first home.

*(Right) Tom Gerdy is steady on the ladder as he makes sure a corner is square. (Below) Raising the walls was a true team effort.*



The second home, referred to as Lynchburg 2, sits directly across the street from the original Lynchburg home, which was built in 2004. Volunteers, headed by Evelyn Condrey, set up a refreshment, resting and registration station in the front yard of the original home. Residents of Lynchburg 1 watched from their front porch as the home took shape, visit-

ing the site occasionally. They are looking forward to having new neighbors. Five special needs adults will occupy the group home.

Many area churches made the build possible. Members of United Methodist Men and United Methodist Women

were indispensable, as were neighbors, friends and staff.

"The Habitat for Humanity Crazies," as they call themselves, dedicate much of their time to building homes for Habitat for Humanity and brought their expertise to this Heart Havens home. □

— Kiki Nusbaumer,  
Heart Havens

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

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



c/o Tom Coffman, President  
4837 Village Lake Dr.,  
Richmond, VA 23234

**Retired Clergy Housing Corp.**

Phone: (804) 271-7219; Fax: (804) 271-4558  
E-mail: <ncltlc@comcast.net>

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# 2012 Special and Sustaining Program Grant

## Special and Sustaining Program Grants to local churches/faith groups reaching out into communities

**B**ecause the mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, the Virginia Conference has long seen the need to assist churches which are reaching out into their communities. The Common Table, Committee on Ethnic Minority Concerns and Advocacy, and United Methodist Women have combined their resources, including a designated portion of the Church Extension Apportionment, to assist in this work. A total of \$106,750 will be distributed to the mission projects listed on these pages. For more information about a specific project, or how you can assist, contact the appropriate persons listed below; or call Bev Myers in the conference Office of Connectional Ministries at 1-800-768-6040 or (804) 521-1100, ext. 134, or e-mail <BevMyers@vaumc.org>.

### Special Program Grants

#### ALEXANDRIA DISTRICT

**Rising Hope Noonday Meals Program** supplements its other ministries by providing a nourishing meal to those who come to Rising Hope for the Noon Day Worship Service seeking spiritual nourishment. The meal is served Tuesday through Friday, and on Sunday. Contact: Keary Kincannon, 8220 Russell Road, Alexandria, VA 22309; (703-360-1976); <PastorKeary@risinghopeumc.org>.

**Silverbrook UMC and Retreat Center** offers two retreat opportunities every month at their facility, which is "a step back in history..." combined with ... "a little slice of peace and quiet in the midst of nature" – in the middle of suburban northern Virginia. The retreats serve busy and harried northern Virginians, many of whom are of a diverse ethnic population. Contact: Kimberly Barker-Brugman, 8616 Silverbrook Rd., Lorton, VA 22079; (703-690-4159); <pastorkim@cox.net>.

#### ARLINGTON DISTRICT

**Bruen Chapel UMC ESL Program** offers three 6- to 7-week sessions of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to the community. Contact: Ruth Burgess, 3035 Cedar Lane, Fairfax, VA 22031; (703-560-1665); <pastorbruenchapel@gmail.com>.

#### CHARLOTTESVILLE DISTRICT

**Cub Care Packages** – Nelson UMC is partnering with a coalition of churches and nonprofits in its community to provide backpacks of food for hungry children on weekends, holidays and summer vacation when free or reduced-cost lunches are not available. Contact: Pettis VanDerNoot, 5239 Thomas Nelson Hwy., Arrington, VA 22922; (434-263-4082); <pettiskn@gmail.com>.

**Ready Set Cook (First UMC Charlottesville)** is a 12-week culinary arts class whose focus is to create and strengthen job skills for people who seek to improve their position in life by increasing and sustaining employment for the participants. Contact: Phyllis Back,



*Students in the "Ready Set Cook" class at First UMC, Charlottesville, learn the fine art of cutting up vegetables.*

160 Peregrory Lane, Charlottesville, VA 22902; (434-977-6981, ext. 288); <backp@acrj.org>.

#### ELIZABETH RIVER DISTRICT

**Get Smart** at Great Bridge UMC serves high school students with a Tuesday after-school program which provides fun, exercise and mentoring. Dinner is served to the students and their families, and is followed with character-building games and activities. The evening

concludes with mentors assisting with schoolwork, while parents may attend informative workshops on health, nutrition and fitness; financial planning; and other topics offered by church members. Contact: Wendy Scott, 344 Faire Chase, Chesapeake, VA 23322; (757/376-3864); <wsaag01@aol.com>.

**Oak Grove Community Dinner** is a free weekly dinner which offers food and fellowship available to individuals and families in the Hampton Roads community. Contact: Kathy Hodges, 472 N. Battlefield Blvd., Chesapeake, VA 23320; (757-547-2319); <kathy@oakgroveumc.org>.

#### FARMVILLE DISTRICT

**Blessings in a Backpack** serves South Hill Elementary School children whose families qualify for the federal free and reduced meal program and who may not have any or enough food on the weekends. Every Friday, students receive backpacks with staples that require little to no preparation. Contact: Kent Wise, 3088 Busy Bee Road, South Hill, VA 23970; (434-447-4335); <pastorkent@hughes.net>.



*This high school student gets assistance with his homework during the "Get Smart" program at Great Bridge UMC, Elizabeth River District.*



## HARRISONBURG DISTRICT

**Shiloh UMC Enrich Program** serves at-risk children by providing a half-day summer enrichment program which includes two meals and a snack daily. Contact: Lucinda Erbach, 392 Thompson St., Strasburg, VA 22657; (540-465-3382); <luellie392@hotmail.com>.

## LYNCHBURG DISTRICT

**Amherst Cares (Emmanuel UMC)** provides food for middle school children who have little or no food on the weekends. Teachers have recognized improvements in academic performance, behavior and attendance since the implementation of this program. Contact: Beth Gamble, 297 Ridge Drive, Amherst, VA 24521; (434-946-7657); <bethgamble32comcast.net>.

## RICHMOND DISTRICT

**Belmont UMC Youth Outreach Program** reaches into the nearby Broad Rock community to mentor youth, providing leadership training, social skills, Christian character education, life skills, academic assistance, and opportunity for community service projects, college tours and other relevant experiences. Contact: Larry Cochran, Barbara McDougald or Marie Coone; (804-275-6336); <belmontumcrichmond@gmail.com>.

**Celebrate Recovery (New Song UMC)** is a ministry that focuses on the Twelve Steps and Eight Biblical Principles, with key emphasis on Jesus Christ, to help people deal with various types of dependency. It incorporates dinner, worship and share groups. Contact: Heather Shaheen, 7450 Colt's Neck Rd., Mechanicsville, VA 23219; (804-559-6064); <hshaheen96@gmail.com>.

**Centenary UMC Walk-in Ministry** partners with other downtown Richmond churches to offer a noontime meal to the growing street population. Centenary offers Friday lunch, and now also offers a warm foot soak, massage, pedi-care and clean socks for the tired feet of the poor through its "Bless My Sole Footwashing Ministry," as well as offering Tuesday and Thursday morning sidewalk greeters with coffee and a smile. Contact: Ann Davis, 411 E. Grace St., Richmond, VA 23219; (804-648-8319); <cent.davis@verizon.net>

**Food & Clothing Ministry of Belmont UMC**, supported by volunteers from the church and the community, embraces the changing neighborhood by offering food and clothing assistance to those in need in the community. Contact: Larry Cochran (804-275-6336); <belmontumcrichmond@gmail.com> or <lcochran6@verizon.net>.

**Lakeside UMC Neighborhood Outreach** is a ministry for neighborhood outreach to a diversified immigrant and low-income community, providing help with not only spiritual needs, but also with other personal and acculturation issues such as Immigration and Naturalization Service concerns, legal and medical assistance, job search assistance, affordable housing and crisis manage-

ment. Contact: Nancy Robinson, 2333 Hilliard Rd., Richmond, VA 23228; (804-873-1487); <nancyrobin7856@aol.com>.

## ROANOKE DISTRICT

**Newport Cares Backpack Ministry** provides weekend meals for Eastern Elementary and Middle School students who are identified by the school. Contact: Morris Fleischer, P.O. Box 133, Newport, VA 24128; (540-544-7183); <nmoumc@pemt.net>.

**Shalom Zone: Grace Ministries** is a ministry to the disenfranchised of downtown Roanoke with an emphasis on the recovering community, the immigrant community and marginalized people. It offers help with immigration and Fair Housing law, jail ministries and worship opportunities, and education and nutrition opportunities. Contact: Don Edwards, esq., 4819 Golfview Dr., Roanoke, VA 24019; (540-266-7262); <donedwards.esq@gmail.com>.

## STAUNTON DISTRICT

**Greenville UMC** offers an after-school program which supplements the one offered by the local elementary school, which has had to reduce the number of days it offers due to budget cuts. The program serves neighborhood students who are struggling with the Standards of Learning tests by offering this free program, which includes free transportation. Contact: Joyce Hinton, 3111 Lee Jackson Highway, Staunton, VA 24401; (540-337-0118); <gumcoffice1@verizon.net>.

## Sustaining Program Grants

### ARLINGTON DISTRICT

**Grace Ministries** seeks to engage and empower the low-income immigrant community in northern Virginia through the distribution of food, clothing, school supplies and over-the-counter medications; by providing families with emergency funding for utility bills, rent assistance, medical and pharmacy bills; and providing vocational training in high-demand occupations. Contact: Martha Real, 13600 Frying Pan Rd., Herndon, VA 20171; (703-793-0026); <mreal@florismc.org>.

### EASTERN SHORE DISTRICT

**Agape Christian Children's Community Center** provides a healthy nurturing environment for at-risk children of the small rural ethnic minority community of Horntown through a preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds that is open 11 hours daily, Monday through Friday; after-school program for kindergarten through second grade; and Vacation Bible School during the summer months. Contact: Brenda M. Child, 12021 Robinson Ferry Rd., Broadnax, VA 23920; (434-848-3329); <dougchild@telpage.net>.

(Continued on next page)

## ELIZABETH RIVER DISTRICT

**Club Sandwich** serves children from neighboring low-income, at-risk, transient families. These children receive the love and compassion of Christ through the mentoring, tutoring and caring of the director, church members and volunteers. Contact: Debbie Winn or Joann McClung, 288 East Little Creek Rd., Norfolk, VA 23505; (757-587-2996); <joannmccclung@cox.net>.

**Wesley Community Service Center** provides Christian-based witness through such programs and services as congregate and home-delivered meals; emergency support services; youth development; representative payee and guardianship services for the mentally challenged; individual and family support services, as well as social action/advocacy on behalf of the poor and disadvantaged in the south side of Portsmouth. Contact: John G. Hatcher Jr., P.O. Box 1396, Portsmouth, VA 23705; (757-399-0541); <wesleys@exis.net>.

## HARRISONBURG DISTRICT

**Lighthouse Center for Children and Youth** provides before- and after-school care and a preschool program for the economically depressed community, including hot meals to subsidize the children's nutritional needs. Contact: Sheila Morris, director, P.O. Box 34, Elkton, VA 22827; (540-298-5309); <Lighthouse4kidzz@aol.com>.

## LYNCHBURG DISTRICT

**Park View Community Mission** seeks to meet the increasing physical and spiritual needs of the homeless and needy of the community with bagged groceries, weekly meals, Bible study and fellowship. This mission is leading to a new multicultural faith community, more representative of the current community around the church. Contact: Rev. Phil Showers, 2420 Memorial Ave., Lynchburg, VA 24501; (434-845-8468); <Phil2\_13@yahoo.com>.

## RICHMOND DISTRICT

**Black Methodists for Church Renewal** strengthens the ethnic local churches by training its youth in order to realize the inclusivity of the General Church. Contact: Willard H. Douglas, P.O. Box 26941, Richmond, VA 23261; (804-321-4222); <Douglas546@aol.com>.

**Kids' Club** of Central UMC provides a safe, fun place for children to learn about Jesus with their friends and neighbors, and serves as a springboard for other outreaches in the neighborhood such as an Easter egg hunt, Super Bowl party, camping opportunities and Vacation Bible School. Families of participating children desire to be a part of what is happening at Central UMC because of the positive experiences their children are having at Kids' Club. Contact: Sandy Harmon, 1211 Porter St., Richmond, VA 23224; (804-288-3063); <sandy@wrightdunn.com>.

**Sherbourne Food Pantry** provides food and spiritually nurtures needy residents and neighbors in the community where the need for food is very apparent. Contact: Sandy Sahnaw, 2619 Sherbourne Rd., Richmond, VA 23237; (804-559-0705, 804-921-2187); <sahnaws@comcast.net>.

## ROANOKE DISTRICT

**Hispanos Unidos** provides help and guidance for increasing numbers of the Hispanic community in the greater Roanoke and New River valleys in all areas: housing, jobs, immigration issues, assistance in dealing with bureaucracy, teaching basic shopping techniques, etc. Contact: Rev. Dave Rochford, 19 Cedar Ridge Dr., Daleville, VA 24083; (540-992-3030); <pastor@stmarksmethodist.com>.



*Gathered for a service of baptism is part of the Casa del Alfarero (Potter's House) congregation of the Hispanos Unidos outreach ministry of the Roanoke District, based at Huntington Court UMC. On the left is the Rev. Gustavo Segovia de Molley, of the Methodist Church of Mexico on loan to the Virginia Conference; with him are his wife Lori, son Jose, and daughter Lily.*

**UMC Community Outreach Program of Roanoke** provides a safe and nurturing environment for children and families in inner-city Roanoke who are in need of resources not available to them through other channels, exposing them to Christian values and teaching. Tutoring, Christian education, enrichment activities and guidance; as well as a clothes closet, school supplies and evening meals are provided. Contact: Rebecca Parsons, 305 Mountain Ave., SW, Roanoke, VA 24016; (540-324-3103); <beck12\_98@yahoo.com>.

**West End UMC** was a declining inner-city church which has chosen to engage its multicultural community with an urban ministries program, with the goal of once again becoming a community church. This initiative includes the church's youth group, which has greatly increased in size and is ethnically diverse. Contact: David Tanner, 1221 Campbell Ave. SW, Roanoke, VA 24015; (540-344-0206, 540-989-3250); <dtannerea@gmail.com>.

## STAUNTON DISTRICT

**Greenville United Methodist Women (UMW)**, through its "Food on Fridays" program, provides food for needy children on weekends and holidays, and connects children and their parents to much needed community resources. Contact: Beth Haynes, 823 Wagon Shop Rd., Middlebrook, VA 24459; (540-377-6220); <gumcoffice1@verizon.net>.



# Upcoming Events – for all ages!

## FEBRUARY 2012

**United Methodist Day at General Assembly, Feb. 2.** State Capitol, Richmond. This annual event in its 20th year is for all United Methodists concerned with issues before the Virginia General Assembly. Sponsored by the Virginia Conference Board of Church and Society, conference Legislative Network and United Methodist Women, UM Day gives congregations a vehicle for reaching beyond themselves and introduces them to the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church in a meaningful way. **Early bird registration and payment of \$20/person must be received by Friday, Jan. 20.** (See related article and registration form on pg. 13 of this *Advocate*.) More information is available in the "Events" section of the Web at <www.vaumc.org>.

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

## APRIL 2012

**'ReFirement: A Creative Spark' for Older Adults, April 20-21.** Blackstone Conference and Retreat Center. Sponsored by the conference Older Adult Council, this retreat will focus on fostering the spark of creativity in order to enrich the lives of older adults and enhance the ministries of the church. Workshops include watercolor and acrylic painting, music, liturgical movement and knitting/crocheting for making prayer shawls. Why attend? A resolution to the 2005 White House Conference on Aging stated: "Research suggests that active participation in the arts and learning promotes physical health, enhances a sense of well-being among older Americans, improves

quality of life for those who are ill, and reduces the risk factors that lead to the need for long-term care..." For more information, contact the office of Lay Leadership Excellence, (804) 521-1153 or 1-800-768-6040, ext. 153, or <marthastokes@vaumc.org>.

## MAY 2012

**Festival of Homiletics, May 14-18.** Atlanta. The Virginia Conference Order of Elders encourages all pastors to consider attending this week of preaching and teaching. The festival is the premier training event in preaching in the country. A link is provided on the Virginia Conference Web site to help connect clergy who want to carpool to Atlanta. Registration information is available on the Web at <www.vaumc.org> in the "Events" section. **Early registration ends Jan. 31.** Scholarships may be requested through the Virginia Confer-

ence Clergy Development program. An application and instructions may be accessed from <www.vaumc.org>, click "Administrative Services >> Ministerial Services >> Clergy Development." The next deadline is Feb. 10.

## JUNE 2012

**United Nations Seminar, June 25-29.** New York City. An exploration of social justice issues and systemic causes (locally and globally), this trip will help young people ages 16-22 discover a passion to change the world. Sponsored by the General Board of Global Ministries, seminars are presented for a minimum of 15 people. **The goal is to register at least 15 participants by January.** Estimated cost is \$800/person. Final details will be available soon. If interested, e-mail Becky Tate in the conference office of Ministries with Young People at <beckytate@vaumc.org>.

## Springtime By The Sea

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# Nation & World

## Faith guides United Methodist church caught up in Penn State sex scandal

**T**o the Rev. Ed Zeiders, “It is a gift to be a Christian in a time like this.”

Zeiders is the senior pastor of the 1,800-member St. Paul’s United Methodist Church in State College, Pa., where the entire community has been rocked by scandal involving charges of child sexual abuse filed against longtime church member and former Penn State assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky.

God’s grace is offered to all through the cross of Jesus Christ, who bore the sins of the world, Zeiders told his congregation. “When your dreams are dashed, broken and our whole community of learners and seekers living together . . . when it is all affected like this, Christians know what it means to bear one another’s burdens and to carry the wounds of Jesus Christ in our very hearts.”

Sandusky, who maintains his innocence, was re-arrested on Dec. 7 on new charges. Two university administrators face charges of lying to the grand jury; Penn State Coach Joe Paterno has been fired, and the university president, Graham Spanier, has been replaced.

Amid the turmoil, Zeiders and his staff have to address the kind of questions every United Methodist pastor dreads: How does a Christian faith community respond when a prominent member faces such devastating charges? How can clergy, staff and church members care for all involved in a widening crisis?

“For something so deeply personal and so heartbreaking for everybody, pastoral care has to be pretty clearly focused,” Zeiders said. “The senior pastor has to take the lead and define

the nature of the Christian community so that the congregation understands.”

In the church and around town, rumors of the allegations circulated periodically during the two years that the Pennsylvania attorney general called witnesses to testify before a grand jury. The church provided support and care during that time for Sandusky and his wife, and others affected. That care has been ongoing, Zeiders said. “The congregation has been very gracious to people who have found themselves in difficult circumstances.”

St. Paul’s has had a Safe Sanctuaries policy in place for several years, and, Zeiders says, the congregation strictly adheres to it — especially the “two-person rule” in their preschool and other activities.

The church also already had a crisis-management plan in place when the allegations came to light.

Zeiders also happens to chair the Susquehanna Conference’s Commission on Child Advocacy.

In addition, St. Paul’s has a safety net of services as part of its congregational care and health ministries, including links with county agencies and local providers, and those are also a part of the response plan.

Zeiders and his congregation not only have faced a crisis of care but also a crisis of media attention. Camera crews camped on the church’s front lawn, and reporters relentlessly sought out members for comments, but Zeiders refused countless requests for interviews. The church also kept cameras out. “We did not want them intruding in worship,” Zeiders said.

Reporters, however, came in to worship services. “We had no control over that,” he said.

Zeiders said it is not a time for the church to remain silent. He told his congregation that the heartbreaking situation presented an opportunity for them to “give witness to the authenticity of faith . . . to seize the God-given moment even in the face of grave darkness, horrible circumstances that have affected people all around the world.

“What have we to say to those who inquire of the faith, and of our life, except that God loves us all? And that steadfast love never ceases. It is a mercy that knows no end,” he said.

Zeiders also talked about forgiveness, which he described as an act of compassion toward those who are broken in every condition. It restores the bridge between people and sets up the possibility for new beginnings.

God calls Christians to love and forgive, but forgiveness is not without consequences and never involves forgetting sins, he said. □



**Former Penn State assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky is arrested by State College, Pa., police officers. (AP photo)**



# Occupy movement called 'an opportunity' for clergy

**T**he Rev. Rich Lang saw it as an opportunity to be present as a pastor and a peacemaker and went appropriately garbed in his clerical robes, stole and cross. When confrontation threatened, he said he felt called to be a buffer between the police and the protesters marching through Seattle's downtown.

By the end of the day, Lang, senior pastor at University Temple UMC, was one of the six people hit by police with pepper spray. Others included 84-year-old Dorli Rainey and a 19-year-old pregnant woman.

Disturbed by the night's events, Lang wrote a pastoral lament the next morning, describing his experience and his anguish.

In the message, he questions some of his clergy colleagues for failing to recognize what he sees as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

"The [Occupy] movement needs clergy for pastoral care and chaplaincy," he said. "In Seattle, the campers are very young. They are kids and young adults, most unemployed, most on the fringes of society. Clergy are needed to be peacemakers and chaplains. It's an astonishing opportunity for clergy to be with these young souls, the kids and young adults who don't frequent our churches.

"If we had a little more evangelism in us, this is a remarkable opportunity to share the gospel through our pastoral care," he said. "The pulpit is now in the streets."

The rewards are great, he said. "Every time I go [to the camps], I come back full. I'm astonished how bright these people are. This is an opportunity to build relationships and open conversations."

The camps, he said, eventually will be torn down.

"This is a moment when the church can be present and perhaps gain a more intimate understanding of homelessness, how we can be useful in helping the homeless. The great irony of [the Occupy movement] is that it has been the homeless who have helped these kids learn to build



*(Left): The Rev. Monica Corsaro (left), pastor of Rainier Beach UMC, talks with participants in an Occupy Seattle encampment. Corsaro is one of many clergy who has volunteered to serve as a chaplain to the movement, which opposes corporate corruption and greed. (UMNS photo by Paul Jeffrey)*

communities."

The church has much to offer the Occupy movement, Lang said.

"We have experience, wisdom, a larger perspective of building partnerships and what it means to be a partner," he said. "We can see certain things. The movement needs clergy to be present for everybody.

"We have a ministry here — and [the opportunity is] only going to last momentarily."

It was that ministry that inspired Lang to don his clerical robes and stole and walk alongside the protesters on Nov. 15.

Lang said "there was tension in the air from the beginning" as the Occupy Seattle camp and supporters marched to the center of the city to express solidarity with the Occupy Wall Street activists evicted from Zucotti Park.

As the protesters walked, Lang said he watched as a young woman and a police officer verbally provoked one another. Lang watched as the officer inadvertently knocked down the young woman. When her friends stepped in to drag her away, a number of officers began spraying the crowd with pepper spray.

The crowd began to separate,



*Demonstrators wave at passing traffic as they hold signs at an Occupy Seattle demonstration. (UMNS photo by Paul Jeffrey)*

though Lang continued to walk between the protesters and police. Moments later he was hit with pepper spray. "I felt the back of my alb being soaked down," Lang said. "Finally, one officer stepped toward me and shot me full in the face." Blinded, Lang was helped by a couple of the young protesters to the side of a nearby building.

For Lang, it was an instance of police provocation. "The police don't need to bully the marchers. The marchers aren't walking against the police. This [Occupy Seattle] has not been a violent movement; property has not been destroyed. There's no precedent for the extreme reaction."

Seattle Mayor Mike McGinn has apologized to those who were pepper-sprayed during the peaceful protest. □

— Sandra Brands  
for United Methodist News Service

# Hunger continues to plague Horn of Africa

**T**he food shortage in the Horn of Africa is so severe that much-needed assistance often arrives too late.

That was the fate of one family this fall in the Soona-Key camp for displaced persons in Mogadishu, Somalia. All of his seven children, the father sadly told UNICEF, had died from cold and hunger since arriving at the camp.

The stark realities of life and death in Somalia draw the most international attention, but what is happening in the Horn of Africa – affecting more than 13 million people – is a regional dilemma. The worst drought in 60 years, coupled with violence and attacks on refugees, has created new concerns over rising food prices and security issues.

Faith-based aid agencies, including the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and Church World Service (CWS), are tending to the urgent need for food and water while promoting sustainable practices to end the cycle of hunger.

“Unsettled” is the way that Chris Herlinger, a CWS communicator, described Kenya during a November visit to the region.

Worries over the al-Shabaab Somali fighters continue, although most Kenyans support the government’s military action against the rebels, he said. But, he said, foremost in people’s thoughts was the rising cost of food.

Herlinger noted that “everyone I spoke to – in urban and rural areas, professionals and poor – was worried about food prices.

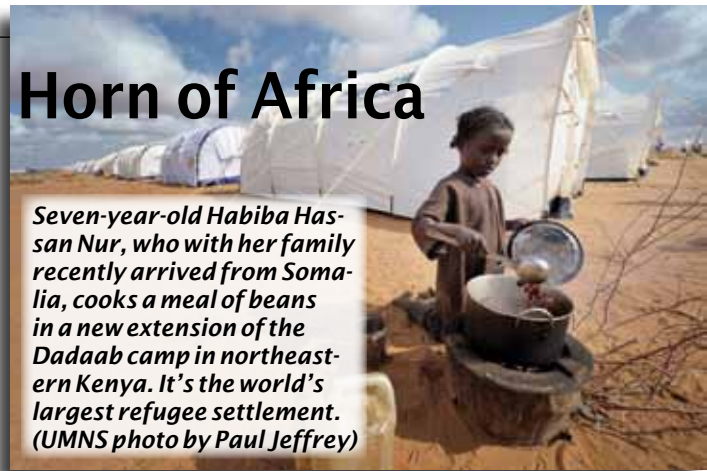
“A Catholic priest in a rural area south of Nairobi told me that he has people coming to him every day, asking for help, needing food. Person-

nel at a Nairobi feeding clinic told me they have had a substantial uptick over the past few months in the numbers of malnourished children requiring food supplements.”

UMCOR has been funding various aid programs in Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia since July. As of Nov. 11, the agency had raised \$874,921.23 for Horn of Africa relief and approved \$430,929 in grants.

Addressing this “prolonged, complex emergency” will require a lot of time and resources, says Melissa Crutchfield, who leads UMCOR’s international disaster response.

“While we are currently working to provide immediate relief to displaced persons and those with acute needs such as malnutrition, our focus moving forward will address some of the root causes of the drought and famine,” she noted. The emphasis will be on projects promoting sustainable agriculture, healthy livestock, climate-change adaptation and disaster-risk reduction.



*Seven-year-old Habiba Hassan Nur, who with her family recently arrived from Somalia, cooks a meal of beans in a new extension of the Dadaab camp in northeastern Kenya. It's the world's largest refugee settlement. (UMNS photo by Paul Jeffrey)*

Although some progress has been made in Somalia, most children 5 and younger in camps for the displaced are severely malnourished. UMCOR has partnered with the International Blue Crescent to provide milk and vegetables to 1,000 such children in the Mogadishu area.

The estimated 4.8 million struggling to survive in Ethiopia include some 120,000 Somalis who have crossed the border to Ethiopia and are living in crowded, under-resourced refugee camps in the community of Dollo Odo, according to UMCOR.


In Bokolomayo, a growing refugee camp with 38,000 inhabitants, UMCOR is working with International Orthodox Christian Charities and the ACT Alliance to provide food, latrines, water and education facilities.

Several projects in Kenya focus on clean water. With the help of UMCOR grants, GlobalMedic is providing local communities and some 500 refugee and internally displaced families with a year’s access to clean drinking water through Rainfresh water filters and Aquatabs water treatment tablets.

UMCOR contributions to Church World Service support food distribution and the Water For Life/Water For All programs for five communities in Mwingi, part of the agency’s disaster risk reduction initiatives in Kenya.

You can donate to any UMCOR project by placing a contribution in the offering plate at a local United Methodist church; by sending a check to UMCOR, P.O. Box 9068, New York, NY 10087-9068; or by calling 1-800-554-8583, where credit card donations are accepted. You can also give online by clicking on any of the “Give Now” links at <[www.umcor.org](http://www.umcor.org)>. □


– Linda Bloom, United Methodist News Service



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# Twelve ways to help fight hunger

**T**he United Methodist Board of Church and Society says that every minute 11 children who are 5 or younger die of hunger-related causes, and about 800 million people suffer from chronic or acute hunger. Think this is a problem too big for you to make a difference? Not so. To help you get started, here are a dozen ways you can make a difference today.

**1. Go the second mile through The Advance.** The Advance, an accountable, designated-giving arm of The United Methodist Church, ensures 100 percent of each gift reaches its intended mission or ministry. Working in 100 countries around the globe, Advance projects not only alleviate suffering and respond to disasters but also address the root causes of poverty and injustice, and make long-lasting improvements to the quality of life through development and education.

**2. Buy a water buffalo, or a goat, or a flock of chicks ... through Heifer International.** A charitable gift through Heifer International, a United Methodist partner, provides animals and training to help families around the world build a better future for themselves and their communities. Traditionally, recipient families give the first offspring of the animal they receive to another family in need, and the gift, quite literally, keeps on giving.

**3. Make a group, housing or agriculture loan to an entrepreneur across the globe for as little as \$25.** Kiva is a nonprofit organization with a mission to connect people through lending to alleviate poverty. Leveraging the Internet and a worldwide network of microfinance institutions, Kiva lets individuals lend big or small amounts to help create opportunity around the world.

**4. Participate with Stop Hunger Now,** a United Methodist partner and international hunger-relief organization that coordinates food distribution and other

lifesaving aid. More than 100,000 volunteers have packaged meals through Stop Hunger Now's meal-packaging program. These meal packages are shipped around the world to support school feeding programs and crisis relief. The food has a shelf life of five years.

**5. Urge Congress to end hunger through the Bread for the World letters campaign.** The interfaith organization, another United Methodist partner, is a collective Christian voice encouraging U.S. decision-makers to end hunger globally. Bread for the World members write personal letters and e-mails and meet with members of the U.S. Congress. Working through churches, campuses and other agencies, Bread for the World involves more people in advocacy.

**6. Walk to help others.** CROP walks sponsored by the United Methodist-supported Church World Service are popular hunger-fighting venues for



*Preschoolers join volunteers packing sweet potatoes for the Society of St. Andrew during the 2010 Virginia Annual Conference session in Norfolk.*

people of all ages. Walkers of all ages collect pledges for each mile they walk. Today more than 2,000 communities across the United States join in more than 1,600 CROP Hunger Walks each year.

**7. Become a "backpack buddy."**

Children who depend on free school breakfasts and lunches may go hungry at suppertime and on weekends. "Backpack buddies" programs provide children from food-insecure homes with weekend meals during the school year. Local churches and other groups collect and fill bags with child-friendly non-

perishable food. In a typical backpack ministry, children receive a backpack containing six balanced meals and two healthy snacks every Friday.

**8. Compete with other congregations.** United Methodist churches and other congregations in the Salt Lake City Valley, for example, sponsor the "Golden Celery" Award challenge every summer to benefit a community food pantry. The church with the most pounds of food per attendance at church donated for the month of July wins.

**9. Contribute to – or start – a food pantry at your church.** Don't know much about it? Get involved in community or state food banks to learn. Feeding America is a good resource. Its mission is to feed America's hungry through a nationwide network of member food banks and engage people in the fight to end hunger.

**10. Deliver Meals on Wheels.** Meals on Wheels is the oldest and largest American organization made up of and representing community-based Senior Nutrition Programs in all 50 U.S. states as well as U.S. territories.

**11. Glean through the Society of St. Andrew.** The ecumenical organization founded by United Methodists has three hunger-relief programs. The Gleaning Network and the Potato and Produce Project deliver donated leftover and unmarketable agricultural produce to people in need. The third – Harvest of Hope – informs people about the hunger problem and invites them to be part of the solution.

**12. Show you care through the Souper Bowl of Caring.** Mobilizing young people to fight hunger and poverty in their local communities, Souper Bowl of Caring is a youth-led effort that encourages people to contribute one dollar each at worship services on Super Bowl Sunday. In 2011 across the United States, 15,238 groups generated \$9,583,338 in cash and food items for local charities. □

– Barbara Dunlap-Berg,  
United Methodist Communications



# Local Church



▲ United Methodist Women at **Mount Zion UMC** in Leesburg threw a birthday party for one of the Virginia Conference-supported mission projects, the Henry Fork Service Center in Rocky Mount. After visiting the center's Web page to find the agency's "Wish List," the women of Mount Zion brought coloring books, art supplies, paper and pencils and gift bags, plastic forks and spoons, even trash bags.



▲ **White's UMC** in Rustburg is celebrating its 200th anniversary on Jan. 15. The church was started by two Quaker men who had been turned out of their church for marrying Methodist women! The original building was a log structure which served for about 40 years. The first service was held on Sunday, Jan. 12, 1812; at that time the name was White's Methodist Episcopal Church. The present building was constructed around 1850 using some of the boards from the original church. The church has been committed to mission and its community. "We are a church committed to serving our God and community," wrote member Kim Millner. "We hope that with God's help it will continue to do so for many more hundreds of years." Photos above show the church as it was in the mid-1800s (inset) and present day.



◀ Theresa Wilson puts the finishing touches on the sanctuary tree at **Shepherd's UMC**, Fredericksburg District. The church, with the help of the surrounding community, collected more than 1,000 non-perishable food items, which were given to the King and Queen County Food Bank, to decorate the tree.



▲ The 2011 Charlotte Seegars Mission Recognition Banquet, in support of the Henry Fork Service Center, was held Nov. 6 at **Bethlehem UMC**. Each year a person and a group within a United Methodist church are selected to receive the Charlotte Seegars Mission award. Just as Charlotte Seegars, the founder of the Henry Fork Service Center, unselfishly dedicated her life to caring for others, this award is intended to honor a person or a group that gives wholeheartedly and faithfully to others through personal mission and the missions of the church. Recipients of this year's award were from **Red Valley UMC** in Boones Mill. The church's food ministry, thrift store and bread and milk ministry reach out into the community and provide items to those in need. Pictured, from left: Deb Broadwater, member of the Henry Fork Board; Connie Dudley, Ron Rocke and Rachel Maupin, representing Red Valley. Also pictured is Gene Moorefield, chair of the Henry Fork Board.



▲ The South Central Virginia Operation Christmas Child Team, led by Sarah Stokes of Farmville UMC, collected 10,235 shoe box gifts for Operation Christmas Child. **Farmville UMC** packed 615 of these boxes. Pictured are several volunteers and the truck loaded with the more than 10,000 boxes leaving from the Farmville UMC Collection Center.



▲ Trey Parks, son of Susan and the Rev. Bob Parks, former pastor at **Main Street UMC** in Suffolk and now the Farmville District superintendent, became the 131st Scout from Main Street UMC's Troop 1 to achieve the rank of Eagle Scout. The current pastor, the Rev. Myrtle Frances Hatcher (right), gave the invocation. Trey graduated from high school early and will enter the Air Force in January. His Eagle status automatically puts him at a higher rank in the Air Force.





▲ Some 25 members of **The Church of the Good Shepherd** (United Methodist) in Vienna walked in solidarity with those who must walk miles every day just to get water. The Nov. 13 walk in Vienna supported efforts of Church World Service, which helps get water and other essentials to remote areas of the world.

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▲ **Scott Memorial UMC** celebrated Veterans' Sunday on Nov. 13, honoring members and guests who served in the armed forces from World War II to the present. Pictured from left, first row: Joe Wise, John Lane, Edward Williams, George Schimmel, Barney Reil, Charlie Johnson, Mike Dagney, Suzi Dagney, Nora Jane Johnson; second row: Michael Harris, William Bundy, Glenn Gurganus, Paul Wright, William Nuckols, Seth Pillsbury, Curtis Belile and Judd Moss.

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▲ In the fall **Piney Ridge UMC**, part of the Pamplin Charge in the Farmville District, hosted "Wesley Sunday" as a joint fifth Sunday service. The service was based upon Service of Word and Table IV, which was modeled after a traditional Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren service. "A Litany for Heritage Sunday" was used from *The Book of Worship*. The congregation sang traditional Wesleyan hymns "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing" and "Come Let Us Use the Grace Divine."



Susanna Wesley, the Mother of Methodism, visited Piney Ridge in the form of the Rev. Libby Wright (center), a retired conference elder. The event attracted more than 100 people from across the charge and members from all four churches participated. Senior pastor the Rev. Herndon Jeffreys (right) and associate pastor Adam Hall (left) coordinated and co-led the service. The Pamplin Charge consists of Evergreen, Pamplin, Piney Ridge and Centenary churches in Appomattox and Charlotte Counties.

## Mission team gets out of comfort zone in Dominican Republic

by Heather Scott

When our 11-member mission team from Pleasant Hill UMC left for the trip to the Dominican Republic, we knew we would be working with no air conditioning, but there was much more to the trip than we could have imagined. The team prepared for both construction and Vacation Bible School.

Waking up in a new country, we learned there were more surprises. Electricity was not reliable. It was only available from the utility company about 10 hours a day, and power surges destroyed some electronics. Plumbing was present, but very minimal compared to American standards. There was no hot water for bathing, and every other fixture leaked. Also, there were many bugs and spiders, including tarantulas! We definitely had left our comfort zone.

Construction jobs primarily included camp improvements. Bible school was cut short from our original plans because Tropical Storm Emily hovered over the Dominican Republic for 2½ days. But Emily did not keep the children from learning. A puppet, crafts and games were used to help the children learn the lessons. One game from this year's Pleasant Hill UMC's Vacation Bible School was used to illustrate when Jesus is in our heart, we overflow with love for others. The missionaries show their love for the Dominican people, but they feel especially drawn to teach the children about Jesus and God's plan for their lives. By first teaching a child about Jesus, you can teach the whole family.

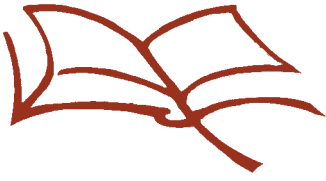
Each member of the team now has a better understanding of our blessings here in America. We also are thankful for the opportunity to serve in the Dominican Republic and to be able to meet some wonderful people who are truly precious to God.

— Heather Scott, Pleasant Hill UMC, Danville District



(Above) Mission team members attach screen to a large window frame.  
(Left) Dominican children learn about Jesus during Vacation Bible School.





# Living the Word



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**  
**Haniel R. Garibay** currently serves as Cross Cultural Common Witness Coordinator of the Methodist Federation for Social Action. He is on the board of the Virginia Conference Board of Church & Society and of the National Association of Filipino-American United Methodists. Originally from the Philippines, Haniel has a B.A. degree from the Philippine Christian University, a UMC-affiliated institution, and a master's degree in international development from the University of Sussex, UK. He also is a home missionary, a lay status within the UMC (para. 1314 Book of Discipline) for men engaged in helping and caring ministries. He is married to Olma Eleanor Olay, who serves as multi-ministry director at Resurrection UMC in Chesapeake. They live in Virginia Beach.

**January 8, 2012**

*God-driven power and authority*  
**Genesis 41:1-52**

**A**s a child, what struck me most about the story then packaged as “Joseph and His Brothers” was Joseph’s ability to interpret dreams. As an adult, though dreams and their meaning still fascinate and intrigue me, I have come to see the same story in terms of how it reminds us of the use of gifts and positions of power by someone “in whom is the spirit of God.”

Joseph’s resumé not only included the ability to interpret dreams, but also leadership qualities. However, he did not claim personal glory from such abilities but instead attributes them to God. Acknowledging that God is higher than we are is crucial, especially when we, like Joseph, are entrusted with great power and responsibility.

Joseph didn’t just interpret Pharaoh’s dreams convincingly, he also offered him a sound plan to deal with the inevitable great famine, which Pharaoh’s dreams were about. So, Joseph, too, had the knowledge of a technocrat. Even then, Joseph provides us a further example of humility as he did not present himself as the person that would implement the plan when he suggested to Pharaoh to “look for a discerning and wise man in charge of the land of Egypt.”

But Pharaoh looked no further and saw that Joseph was “the man,” the man “in whom is the spirit of God.” He made Joseph next only to himself in terms of authority and power with the major responsibility of preparing Egypt for the famine. Since the famine spread beyond Egypt, the measures Joseph planned and implemented actually saved other nations as well.

Joseph showed what it is to be

someone in a position of great power, but in whom the spirit of God resides. Such a position is used to do God’s will, for the common good, for God’s creation, and not for selfish ends or to exalt oneself.

In today’s world, there are those who wield considerable power. Could it be as a head of government, a ranking cabinet member or CEO of a large corporation, a drug kingpin, a head of a household, a particular class or race? Then let’s ask ourselves: Which positions of power today can be occupied by someone “in whom is the spirit of God”? □

**January 15, 2012**

*Faithfulness wherever and whenever*  
**Genesis 42:1-38; 45:1-28**

**J**oseph probably wasn’t thinking of what his brothers did to him anymore while he was still “rising from the ranks,” from being a slave, then a convict, then the second most powerful man in Egypt. He probably was too focused and occupied to be dwelling on bad memories.

But when he first met his brothers, and found out that Jacob’s clan was still alive, he may have said to himself, “so that’s why I’m here. God sent me here so I could save his family as well as many others from starvation.” Realizing that his forced sojourn to Egypt was God’s will made it easier for Joseph, too, to forgive his brothers, even if he had to subject them to a series of tests to convince himself of their repentance.

But before the famine and seeing his brothers again, it may not have been clear to Joseph what God’s will was. But Joseph, nevertheless, remained steadfast in his God and used to the hilt the gifts given to him according to God’s wishes.

Many of us probably wonder what



God has in store for us or where God will send us, as in the case of Joseph. I myself do wonder like this sometimes, but I don't dwell too much on it. It may interest us to note Joseph's contrasting circumstances in Egypt. As a slave, he couldn't choose who his master would be since slaves were simply commodities that could be bought. In prison, his movements were even more limited. But he made the best in both situations that ultimately led him to a position of power that gave him all the leeway he wanted.

Some of us may find ourselves in situations over which we feel we have little control. But rather than ask God why we are in that situation, it would be best to do what we can, like Joseph, to work our way out of it. There's also nothing that precludes us from making plans and proactively making them happen even if we believe God has a plan for us. The important thing is, just like Joseph, we continue to have faith in God and use our gifts not just for our benefit but more so for the benefit of others. □

## January 22, 2012

*God's intentions and ours*  
**Genesis 50:1-26**

**I**n reading Joseph's story, one might speculate that if his brothers did not sell him to slavery in Egypt, his whole family may have perished from the famine. In fact, since the famine spread beyond Egypt, many more people may have died of hunger, and chaos may have resulted. But certainly God wouldn't want Jacob's family to be wiped out because of the famine, not to mention many others. What would happen to God's promise to Jacob and to his father (Isaac) and his father's father (Abraham)?

Joseph realized, eventually, when he was already in charge of Egypt and learning that his father and the rest of the clan are safe, that he became God's instrument to save his family so God could keep the promise to his ancestors.

We can't second guess God on what God wants. God gives us freedom to do what we want to do, and oftentimes

that freedom is abused by harming others to satisfy some cravings. Joseph's brothers sold him to slave traders to rid themselves of their envy of him as their father's favorite son. The slave traders sold him to satisfy their desire for profit. What is needed to make God's intentions for God's people, which is ultimately for their wellness, prevail?

Believe it or not, God has intentions but needs us, too, to work with God. Much depends, though, on our faithfulness to God. Like Joseph, each one of us has gifts. When we use these gifts, especially when we work together, we can overcome, like Joseph, any difficult situation with which we are confronted. Some of us, like Joseph, acquire great power and authority. If we are faithful to God, we also use that power and authority to do good. If we are faithful to God, we also are ready and willing to forgive.

While God makes good things come out of the bad, it doesn't mean that we should resign ourselves to the evil deeds around us. Joseph did not passively accept his fate, otherwise, he would have remained a slave. For God to keep God's promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, their descendants should do their part. Joseph used his great gifts wisely and he forgave his brothers, who also did their bit by their repentance and readiness to sacrifice.

If God were to work with us, we must do our part too. □

## January 29, 2012

*No borders in God's world*  
**Exodus 1:8-14; 15:1-27**

**T**he crossing of the Red Sea reminds me of a controversial kind of crossing. I'm referring to the unauthorized crossing of the United States border from Mexico. The difference from that of the Exodus story is that the crossing is done in trickles and in small groups, but happening daily. A lot of people in the United States are upset, to say the least, about this entry into their country by these "illegal" migrants. Their concern about the law is understand-

able, especially since there are clear rules for entering the United States. At the same time I'm saddened by the lack of sympathy of some people considering that their own ancestors came to this land uninvited by the original inhabitants.

There are also immigrants who entered the United States who have taken the authorized path who also look down on such "illegal" immigrants. Their feelings are understandable, too, especially since they had to wait years, sometimes up to 20, to be able to immigrate. They think it's unfair that others do it the "easy" way, rather than go through the tedious and lengthy legal process.

As an immigrant who went through the legal process, I actually consider myself lucky not to have to cross the border without authorization. Crossing the border that way subjects one to the dangers of dying of thirst and heat stroke in the desert and from deadly snakes, as well as being raped, especially in the case of women, by their very own guides, called coyotes. People are known to die from all these. One has to be really in desperate straits to attempt that kind of crossing.

The "pull" factors that attract people to cross the border illegally are easy to understand. But it seems that people tend to ignore the "push" factors. The failure of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to generate jobs, let alone ones that earn decent incomes, is the single biggest "push" factor. The political and social turmoil, particularly of the drug wars, is another.

It may not be slavery, but when the need to feed your family and assure a better future for them can't be attained in the usual honest and hard working way in your homeland, then you look for possibilities in other places. If we see the issue this way, as Christians should, then the better we can find solutions such as a sound immigration reform law and, perhaps, the revising of treaties that allow countries more sovereignty in charting their own national development. That would be our "dry ground." □



# Letters & Commentary

## Is 'Occupy Movement' really transforming society?

**“***They may have begun as a protest against corporations and greed, but for a growing number of United Methodists taking part in the Occupy Wall Street movement, the protests are a statement about the spiritual bankruptcy of materialism as well as a call to transform the world. ‘This movement articulates [our call] for a more just society,’ said the Rev. Sandy Gess, pastor at St. Paul’s United Methodist Church in Vacaville, Cal., and a long-time resident of Oakland. ‘The numbers of people who are homeless, unemployed, living on the streets are finding a community [in encampments] where they get assistance, a spiritual home, and have a voice — those of us in the clergy, who really speak on behalf of our spiritual leader, Jesus the Christ, who always advocated for the poor.’”*

**Commentary by  
Bert Duckwall**

— United Methodist News Service

I read the article concerning the role The United Methodist Church is playing as a harbinger of chaos and anarchy called the “Occupy Oakland Movement.” Pastor Gess is very correct in the command of Jesus that is articulated in Jesus’ admonition found in Matthew 22. Here we are confronted with loving our neighbor as ourselves. Unfortunately we must be cognizant of what constitutes transforming society.

In Matthew 25 we are challenged with feeding those that are hungry and thirsty, being a presence in the lives of those imprisoned and lonely. The question asked by his followers was, “when were you in these conditions?” Jesus’ response suggests he was there with the least of these. The questions begging to be answered are: Does this “Occupy” movement and its followers exemplify people that are truly in this condition? What does transforming society in the Wesleyan tradition and biblical sense truly mean?

Many of those protestors I see are people capable of work, any work, honest work, although it may be work they would not ordinarily choose. The ones I see, albeit through television reports, are ones that want more money. Others having graduated from college want jobs consistent with what they believe they are now entitled to have. The problem is they blame the wrong folks. Gess is suggesting America is sinking into a pit of materialism and moral corruption. No question she has a point, however, she misunderstands what Jesus was attempting to stress in transforming society. Jesus stated this in Matthew 16:18, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church...” This command from Jesus establishes

the church, establishes Peter as the church’s first head, and sets the function of Jesus’ bride, the church, to bring people into a relationship with him, and send them forth to love their neighbors so they may have a relationship with him. Will that not transform society? Once that relationship is affected, then good works naturally will be the result.

Loving your neighbor does not mean tear down capitalism, close small businesses, defecate on the American flag, but rather it does mean build a better environment by bringing those pitiful organizers into a relationship with Jesus Christ. I feel quite certain Jesus’ admonition was bringing people into a relationship with him and from that relationship a better society will emanate.

The idea of social justice is a nebulous holdover concept from the 1960s. It assumes there is a pervasive injustice to certain groups of people that Christ would label as the “least of these” are somehow caught in a class struggle — a “Marxian thought” — and exploited by the rich and powerful. This modern day leftist rhetoric lays open the flaws of Marxism that cannot control the driving impulses for power and wealth along with certain motives of success. The only way is through some despotic government control that has proven to be a failed system.

Pastors who claim that God is out there with these protesters should review Matthew 22:21, where Jesus said, “Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s.”

Poverty itself is a relative concept, relative to the time and place along with who is determining what is poor. In fact, the poor of the mainstream of American culture is totally different to that of Africa, or even our First Americans. The “poor” in America are those with only one automobile, one cell phone, one computer, and one LCD TV.

I believe pastors like Gess need to reflect more than the spirit of the 1960s. As a denomination, we don’t need liberals in the pulpit espousing a failed political ideology, but focus on bringing folks into a relationship with Jesus, becoming that compassionate voice for the struggles of those having terrible circumstances, not some radical marcher in the streets. This reflects the very reason The United Methodist Church is rapidly diminishing in influence and membership. If ever The United Methodist Church decides to split, here is the reason: pastors caught up in their misguided theology that often counters the very people they supposedly serve. □

— The Rev. Bert Duckwall is part-time local pastor at Brodnax UMC in Hopewell.



## Pastor is proud of Winkler's fight for social justice

**T**hank you for your excellent November issue on "Gratitude." In contrast to the letter written by your reader in Springfield [pg. 29], I must say that I was proud of the July arrests of two prominent United Methodists active in the fight for social justice.

Both James Winkler, General Secretary of the United Methodist General Board of Church & Society, and the Rev. Robert Edgar, President of Common Cause, were bearing witness to the holy work of ensuring that government serve the common good, rather than special interests, and of linking mercy and justice in national policy. They stood up publicly and prayerfully on behalf of the poor while national politics and budget bickering were ignoring the most vulnerable among us.

Rather than being "ashamed" and "embarrassed," I am proud that these men call The United Methodist Church their spiritual home. From John Wesley's vision and our *Social Principles*, United Methodists continue to link faith and action in service to the forgotten.

I don't imagine that the people of Ebenezer Baptist Church, for example, ever felt that the civil disobedience of Martin Luther King Jr. brought them shame and embarrassment. Quite the opposite. □

— The Rev. Larry Buxton, Burke UMC

## Readers are grateful for Winkler's courage on behalf of the poor and powerless

**R**egarding a letter published in the November 2011 *Virginia Advocate* [pg. 29] about Jim Winkler, General Secretary of the General Board of Church & Society, being arrested by U.S. Capitol police last July for civil disobedience. May we say that we are so very grateful that Mr. Winkler stood courageously against the damage being done to those at the bottom of our economic system.

Winkler was praying and protesting cuts in programs for the poor during the debt-ceiling deliberations. As we read our Bibles, it is apparent to us that it is the same stance that Jesus took in regard to the poor and powerless against the powers in his time.

The Bible is filled with admonitions to care for the widows, orphans, sojourners, essentially the poor and powerless. When we turn from those that Jesus cared about the most, we are turning our backs on our very faith. Far from being embarrassed, we are grateful and joyful for Mr. Winkler's stand. The letter writer might Google "Circle of Protection" currently being advocated by hundreds of pastors on behalf of the poor. □

— Bill and Sybil West, Wrightsville Beach, N.C.,  
former members of Bethany UMC in Brodnax

## Christians being arrested and jailed is nothing new

**J**im Winkler arrested? For what crime? For praying in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol, praying about our elected representatives who were proposing to cut funding benefiting the poor and those in need of help while retaining subsidies for corporations currently making unprecedented profits. [November *Virginia Advocate*, pg. 29]

There is no need for United Methodist to be ashamed.

Christians being arrested is nothing new. There is an endless line of faithful witnesses who have been arrested and jailed: Jesus, while praying in Gethsemane; Jeremiah (37:14-15); John the baptizer; Peter and John; Paul and Silas; John of Patmos; Freeborn Garretson; (Martin Luther would have been jailed if his friends had not abducted him to safety); Martin Luther King Jr.; et al.

The last time Paul was arrested he wrote from prison in Rome, "So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner." (2 Timothy 1:8) When I saw the news photo of Jim Winkler in handcuffs, my only shame is that I have not been more bold in my Christian witness. □

— The Rev. Edward H. Wright, Hampton

## Advocate is still appreciated

**J**ust a word to express my appreciation of the super job you folks do in the preparation of one of the most enjoyable mailings I receive each month. I have been receiving the *Advocate* for many (probably 50 plus) years, and I still look for the next issue to arrive.

I know you folks assemble what many contribute, but the final product to me could not be improved upon in any way. Your commitment (and love of what you do) in my mind is the product which is appreciated by many of us who love hearing what "seekers" in other places are seeking to accomplish.

Thanks for your commitment in producing such a wonderful product. □

— Bob Lear, Springfield, member of Fairfax UMC



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# Clergy & Diaconal

## Deaths

**Phillip Leslie Ragland**, 62, died Nov. 22, 2011. Phil was lay supply pastor of Ebenezer UMC, Staunton District. He served in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War and retired from the Buena Vista Police Department as a lieutenant after 13 years of service.

Survivors include his wife, Pamela Green Ragland; sons, Robert Leslie Ragland and Phillip Leslie Ragland Jr.; daughter, April Marie Lopez; and five grandchildren.



**Ragland**



**Barrow**

The **Rev. Barbara Bow-ers Barrow**, 71, retired elder, died Dec. 5, 2011. She began her ministerial career in 1976 as director of the Wesley Foundation at then named

Madison College (currently James Madison University). She went on to serve Edinburg UMC and First UMC in Lynchburg. She then served as superintendent of the Harrisonburg District and as Virginia Conference director of Higher Education and Campus Ministry. She retired in 2001.

Survivors include her husband, the Rev. Vernie Barrow Jr. (retired elder); children, Judy Williams McMullen, Janice Williams Regan, Jenifer Williams Loker, the Rev. Alan Lester Barrow, Victor Lee Barrow and Lenore Barrow Whitehead; and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

**Emma L. Parker**, widow of the Rev. Herbert T. Parker, died Dec. 1, 2011.

**Ruth Ann Esaias**, widow of the Rev. John R. Esaias Jr., died Nov. 15, 2011. John pastored churches for more than 51 years in New York, New Jersey, Maryland and Virginia, but retired from the Baltimore-Washington Conference. Ruth also was predeceased by her parents, Anna and Marmaduke Dodsworth, Methodist missionaries.

**Gwyn Taylor**, widow of the Rev. Jack Taylor, died Nov. 27, 2011.

**Thelma Grace Woodall Livermon**, widow of the Rev. William "Billy" Livermon Sr., and mother of the Rev. J. Garrett "Garry" Livermon, died Dec. 2, 2011. Garry is pastor of Susanna Wesley UMC in Gloucester. Her son, Chaplain William R. "Bill Tom" Livermon Jr., also preceded her in death.

**Vara Jeffcoat Larkin**, mother of the Rev. Gene Larkin, died Nov. 17, 2011. Gene is pastor of Chesterbrook UMC in the Arlington District.

**Margaret V. Beard**, mother of Gretchen B. Sweat and mother-in-law of the Rev. Thomas W. Sweat, died Nov. 10, 2011. Tom is pastor of Central UMC, Richmond.

**Bernice Henry**, mother of Kathie Vest and mother-in-law of the Rev. John Vest, died Dec. 13, 2011. John is superintendent of the James River District.

**Rollo Houff**, father of the Rev. Michael Houff, died Nov. 14, 2011. Michael is superintendent of the Staunton District.

**Ray Frost**, father of the Rev. Thomas Frost, died Dec. 3, 2011. Tom is pastor of Cunningham UMC, Charlottesville District.

**Tom Phillips**, brother of the Rev. Rachel Gilmore, and brother-in-law of the Rev. Brandon Gilmore, died Nov. 20, 2011. Rachel is pastor of The Gathering, a United Methodist faith

community located in Virginia Beach, and Brandon is pastor of Saint John's UMC in Norfolk.

**Marilyn Long Davis**, youth coordinator of the Farmville District since 2005, died Nov. 15, 2011. Marilyn's husband, George, is the interim youth coordinator.

## Births

**Mary Alexander Combs**, was born Oct. 31, 2011. "Mary Alex" is the daughter of the Rev. Alan Combs and his wife, Morgan. Alan is an elder and pastor of Lane Memorial UMC in Lynchburg.

**Joshua David Johnson**, was born Dec. 7, 2011. He is the son of the Rev. Edward H. Johnson Jr. and the Rev. Amy Dawn Wolz Johnson. Ed Jr. is associate pastor at Virginia Beach UMC and Amy is staff chaplain at Sentara Norfolk General Hospital. Proud grandparents are the Rev. Edward H. Johnson (pastor of Dahlgren UMC, Fredericksburg District) and his wife, Pamela; and the Rev. Arthur L. Wolz Jr. (pastor of Bethany in Gloucester Point, York River District) and his wife, Vicki.

## Marriages

The **Rev. Suzanne Fridley Schmid** and **Dr. John Howard Spencer** were married Nov. 25, 2011, at Pender UMC, Fairfax. They will make their home on the Eastern Shore at the New Hope Charge parsonage, in Pungoteague and Bentonville. John is the widower of the Rev. Jean R. Spencer and Suzanne is the widow of Robert S. Schmid Sr.

### Our Readers Want to Know

Help us keep our readers informed of the latest Clergy and Diaconal news.

**Send us news items of deaths, births and marriages.**



## May *all* local churches reflect 'open facilities for all God's children'



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

**A**ccessibility for persons with handicapping conditions is an ever present issue in most local churches. It is also an issue in parsonages for the pastor and family members. The sad truth is that most of us in the local church avoid being proactive in addressing these challenges. We tend to wait until an emergency presents itself to motivate us to plan for changes that will be inclusive of all persons and their needs.

How many times have I visited at a local church and witnessed other family or church members lifting a wheelchair to help someone enter the church? Or how often I also note persons with physical, visual, hearing limitations trying to navigate old facilities and literally find their way to, or be included in, Sunday school, a church meeting, or worship. It is frequent enough that this always catches my attention as I itinerate across the conference.

When the Cabinet is projecting appointments, we might be aware of a pastor or a member of the pastor's family who cannot manage in the parsonage of the place that we hope to send them, or even manage in the church facility. Then church leaders tend to get busy, try to quickly build ramps and rails, widen hallways, and make needed adjustments. It is very frustrating to realize that the needs for accessibility seem to be placed on the back burner of too many congregations' list of priorities.

In Paragraph 2532.6 of *The Book of Discipline* of The United Methodist Church, local church boards of trustees are given explicit directives to address accessibility issues. An annual audit SHALL be conducted of buildings, grounds, and facilities. The purpose of the audit is to discover and identify what physical, architectural and communication barriers exist. Then the church can plan, in order of priority, how to address these needs. Our goal and hope for all congregations is that we will, over time, eliminate all barriers for anyone of any age, to be able to be and feel included in the ministries of a local church. That is a worthy goal.

What a profound statement it would be if one of our tag lines as United Methodists – "Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors." could be reframed to truly reflect "open facilities for all of God's children"!

Grace and Peace,

Charlene Kammerer

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Rates for advertising and Tributes are available upon request.

### Local Church News

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

### Letters

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

### Staff

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# Jubilee Assistance Fund

*Provide your church members short-term help during a financial crisis and financial management tools to assist them with long-term financial stability.*

## How The Partnership Works

The **Jubilee Assistance Fund (JAF)** was established as a sensible alternative to predatory lending. JAF is a collaborative loan program where a local church establishes an account at the Virginia United Methodist Credit Union to provide collateralized small, short-term loans with very low interest rates for individuals who would not qualify for loans otherwise. The borrower covenants with the church and agrees to receive financial counseling, loan monitoring and payroll deduction.

**To request a JAF program guide or for details on establishing a fund at your church contact:**

**Carol Mathis at 866-657-0004**

**E-mail: [cmathis@vumcu.org](mailto:cmathis@vumcu.org)**



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