



**THE LEAST
OF THESE:**
United Methodists'
focus on poverty

Connecting with the



Virginia Advocate

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

PILLOW TALK



Madeline Pillow
Editor

Not
of this
world



"You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world." (John 8:23 NIV)

"For this world is not our permanent home; we are looking forward to a home yet to come." (Hebrews 13:14 NIV)

I am a Doctor Who fan. I'll admit it is only very recently, but I don't think I would have fully appreciated the meaning of the TV series and the questions and ideas it raises before this time in my life.

For those who don't know, Doctor Who is about a character, the Doctor, who is a member of an alien race known as the Time Lords. He travels through time and space in his Police Box ship meeting all kinds of creatures, reveling in unique worlds and beings and helping if he can.

His favorite beings in the universe just happen to be humans. And in the series, you find that even with so many advanced worlds and creatures, being a human is unique. Along his travels, he takes human companions with him; they keep him grounded and remind him of goodness, love and decency so that the Doctor doesn't gravitate too much toward a "god complex," which with all his power is very hard not to do. And wherever he goes he has people asking, "Doctor Who?"

But as powerful as the Doctor is, he is often a very sad character because he is the only one of his kind left. And sometimes, as much as he guards against it, his companions are killed, lost or have to leave him because of their own lives. There must be a constant fluorescent sign in front of his eyes blinking, "Not of this world."

I don't know about you, but I sure do get a kick when movies or books make me look at things I am wrestling with in my life in a new way.

In the verses above, we are reminded 1. That God and Jesus are not part of this world and 2. Our reality now is not the end goal, we should be looking toward the hereafter.

When I try to understand the hereafter when Earth 2016 is my reality, I have difficulties. Surrounding me right now are familiar smells, sounds and sights that I have accepted and understood for 26 years. Trying to picture what it means that God is not of this world and what not of this world looks like makes me feel like the ground is falling beneath my feet. For the Doctor, he is always reminded that he is different because of the strange worlds and creatures he comes into contact with every episode. (For my Doctor Who fans: is that the sound of a Dalek invasion?)

Should I not get so caught up in what it looks like? Should I be looking for something that feels not of this world?

My human brain may just be getting too literal about everything. Maybe it's in acting not of this world that we get a glimpse of something else. In helping others, there might just be the understanding of the home yet to come, a vision of something that I just can't feel or touch in this reality no matter how hard I try.

Madeline

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Advertising/Tributes

Rates for advertising and tributes are available upon request.

Local Church News

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

Letters

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

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Correction

In the October issue, under the commentary, "Leave a trace," it should be noted that the BSA has never had a checkbox on its application asking about sexual identity or preference.

Above: Members of Warwick Memorial UMC in Newport News care for their neighbors in the Courthouse Green neighborhood by doing yardwork.

The Virginia Advocate Staff

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COMMENTARY

A study in poverty

When the Rev. Katie B. Gooch told me that she had invited two other churches for a joint study on poverty, I was afraid our motives would be misinterpreted. It was September 2014. A year before, Reveille UMC, Richmond District, had been carefully seeking out a relationship with two predominantly African-American churches in the Swansboro area of south Richmond. Koinonia Christian Church and Love Center of Unity Full Gospel Church were welcoming but cautious.

It was a first for all of us, and we did not know how our congregations would react. We were no strangers to Swansboro, having

had volunteers at Swansboro Elementary School for almost 20 years. Now, we were seeking to expand our ministry to the rest of the community. The most important step to breaking into the greater community was to sponsor and participate in building a Habitat for Humanity house in Swansboro in 2013. That summer, Reveille youths spent a mission week in the community, building a raised garden that residents could use to grow their own vegetables.

Although we had made great strides with Koinonia, such as helping them to create a kids' music program on Monday nights, we still had not made the connections and relationships that we felt God calling us to seek.

Reveille decided to do a church-wide study on poverty in fall 2014, using the book *When Helping Hurts*:

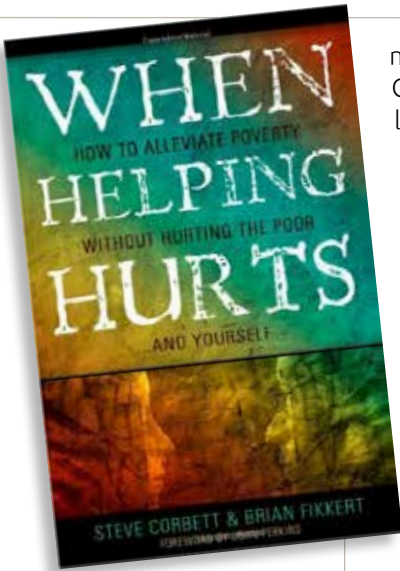
How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor... and Yourself by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert. We found the book an interesting but weighty read and often referred to the study guide, which gave a brief overview of the book and accompanying video.

For a period of six weeks, we invited our partner churches to eat Wednesday night supper with us, followed by the video. We then broke up into three groups to discuss what we had seen and heard. To my great surprise, both congregations showed up in force. At least 40 percent of their congregations attended almost every session with around 20 people from each church participating. Reveille's participation was less enthusiastic when 10-20 people came in a given week. Nevertheless, these



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

COMMENTARY



numbers were good for mixed group discussions.

The premise of the book is that we are all broken in our relationships with God, ourselves, others and with the rest of creation. This rupture in our relationships and impoverishment of spirit are the root causes for the poverty and social injustice in the world.

The book turns the conventional approach to mission on its head. Our emphasis should not be on short-term relief, but on rehabilitation and development. Giving a person a handout such as food, without steps to assist that person in regaining the means to feed his family, is a disservice to the dignity and God-given talents of that individual. The book is a practical guide to equipping people to effectively help the poor by walking alongside them in relationship, assisting them towards the process of reaching their potential, while acknowledging our mutual broken-

ness and need to place God at the center of our lives.

The discussions ranged from defining and considering the meaning of poverty to reevaluating our current ministries through the lens of this new paradigm for solving poverty. We had always believed that material stuff was the only answer and the only deprivation. In the video, we discovered loss of dignity and self-worth were just as important and capable of breaking the human spirit. In the book, there are many stories of misguided kindnesses where the impulse to take charge and impose one's view of what is needed is strong and ultimately leads to failure. We discovered that we must, instead, pursue a process of walking alongside people as they learn to be better stewards of their lives and communities. We can support and assist by using the networks of expertise within our churches where we can be mentors, advisors and cheerleaders.

After the final session of the study, we had a greater understanding of what poverty means for people all over the world. This new approach to outreach was a revelation. We felt a reassessment of our own outreach ministries was necessary in light of all we had learned. Most of all, our need to be in a more dependent, intimate relationship with our Creator was

revealed.

Three months after the study we met at Love Center of Unity church for a reunion and brainstorming. A task force of six was formed, comprised of two members from each church. Our goal is to help Swansboro residents identify what is important to them in the community, what they care about and assist them in setting goals to bring about change. By mobilizing existing assets and those God-given talents, hope, confidence and dignity will be restored and we will be on the road to a right relationship with God. ☞

– Sheelagh Davis is a member of Reville UMC, Richmond District.



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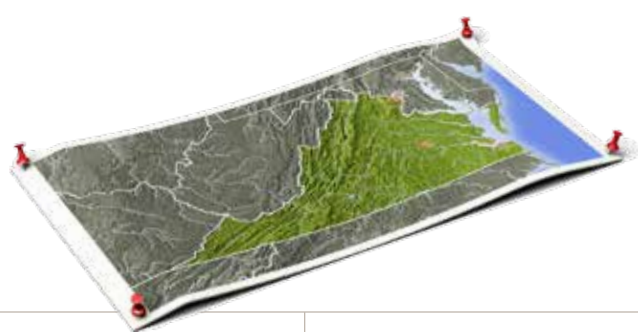
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The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Called to go: Middle schoolers encouraged to be disciples at conference weekend retreat

By Madeline Pillow

More than 460 sixth, seventh and eighth graders and their adult chaperones from 41 churches met together for the Middle School Youth Retreat at Eagle Eyrie in Lynchburg held Nov. 13-15.

During the weekend, youths were challenged to grow as disciples of Christ through powerful worship, Bible study and small groups while building friendships with youths from all over Virginia. Focus was on learning how to be a “Called Generation” with speaker Paulo Lopes, Virginia Conference director

of Ministries with Young People.

Lopes reminded the middle schoolers that their part to play as disciples of Christ is important because of who they are. He told them they shouldn’t let their age in any way be a deterrent to being a part of the church.

“I really believe that God is doing something special, particularly that God is doing something special with you middle schoolers,” Lopes said. “Did you know that when the disciples were called—all of them were teenagers? Did you know that? These were kids that were following

Jesus, and they changed the world.”

Throughout the weekend, Lopes encouraged participants and urged them not to get bogged down in the church structure and forget the great commission of making disciples of the world.

“I really hope you know how important you are to God, how valuable you are to God and that he would do what he did so that you can live, not just live for yourself but live a certain kind of life,” Lopes said.

Also present were older student staff who helped set up for the event and watch over the middle schoolers. This connection allowed the older staff to also gain spiritually from the event.

“During the weekend, I saw several youth commit their lives to Christ,” said Katie Wax, co-chair of Con-

Paulo Lopes and the Keith Elgin Band take a “selfie” with the retreat’s middle schoolers.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

Paulo Lopes, director of Ministries with Young People at the Virginia Conference, led middle schoolers in reflecting on their status as a "Called Generation."



ference Council on Youth Ministries (CCYM). "This intimate and deep time during communion allowed me to slow down and pray over three girls that were from my own youth group. Being able to do this, allowed me to see God's work first hand. Not only did these girls make me enable myself to look back on the day that I committed my life to Christ, but also remind me why I staff these retreats."

The enthusiasm of the middle schoolers noticed by Wax was also on display as the middle schoolers interacted with Lopes during his talks, enjoyed music from the Keith Elgin Band and shared in fellowship with one another.

For Sarah Williams, CCYM member representing the Arlington District,

choosing to serve was important to her because she knew from personal experience how important the middle school years can be for development.

"Middle school is when you begin to define the kind of person you want to become, and it's important for God to be at the center of that path," said Williams. "I started going to church when I was in the sixth grade, and my life changed for the better when I learned about Jesus Christ and his example for the world. I also found a supportive group of friends in the church who have helped me to be a better person and reminded me of my values when I've had to make difficult choices."

The sense of community formed at the retreat, with God at the center,

was the most satisfying result of helping out for Williams. "It was like seeing a lightbulb turn on in their heads. I think the students felt the power and strength of God's love throughout the weekend and were able to form a community amongst themselves which will be a tremendous benefit to them as they head into the challenging teenage years," she said.

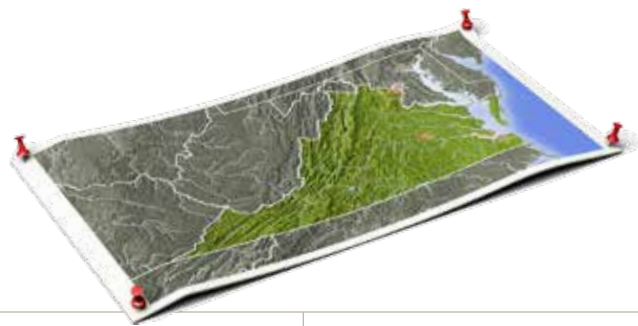
A similar retreat was held for high schoolers Dec. 4-6. 🍷

— Madeline Pillow is editor of the Advocate.

"Did you know that when the disciples were called—all of them were teenagers? Did you know that? These were kids that were following Jesus, and they changed the world."

— Paulo Lopes

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



New location announced for 2016 Ministers' Convocation

By Meredith McNabb



Dr. Norman Wirzba (top), will be keynote presenter, and the Rev. Dr. P. Alice Rogers will preach at the 2016 Ministers' Convocation.

Change is in the air for Ministers' Convocation 2016—a time of fellowship and conversation, rest and spiritual renewal. The event will be April 18-20, and the gathering will be held at a new location this year, the Wyndham Virginia Crossings Hotel and Retreat Center in Glen Allen. The theme this year is “Come to the Table—Bringing Food and Faith Together.”

These changes put the event at a slower time of year for clergy to attend—three weeks after Easter in 2016—and at a location where the Convocation Design Team hopes more clergy will be able to engage with colleagues and with the topic, as well as with optional mission service or golf opportunities immediately following

the event.

The keynote presenter is Dr. Norman Wirzba, professor at Duke Divinity School and the leading expert in the field of theological ethics around what we eat and how we grow it. His publications are numerous, including *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating*, and he'll be speaking with the group twice during convocation.

Other presenters will be from Shalom Farms, an innovative United Methodist-related initiative to both grow good food (on the grounds of Westview on the James camp) and to fundamentally shape nutritional access and food justice in the Richmond area. Their “Prescription Produce” plan has given those receiving food assistance the added support of cooking and nutritional coaching to increase access to healthful food among those in some of the most food-insecure neighborhoods in Richmond.

Bishop Young Jin Cho and the Rev. Dr. P. Alice Rogers will preach and lead

the convocation gathering in spiritual renewal. Dr. Rogers is the lead pastor of Glenn Memorial UMC on the campus of Emory University in Atlanta, Ga., as well as a professor of Contextual Theology at Candler. She has decades of experience in small, medium and large congregations across North Georgia's rural and urban communities, and she is a lifelong worshiper and preacher at the nationally-recognized Salem Camp Meeting.

For more information, or to register, visit www.vaumc.org/MinistersConvocation. Annual Continuing Education grant support through the Ministerial Education Fund apportionment giving is available to VAUMC clergy in need of CEUs, and 1.0 or .5 CEUs are available at the event. You are encouraged to register before Holy Week to ensure lodging availability. 🍷

— The Rev. Meredith McNabb is Virginia Conference director of Clergy Excellence.



Aerial view of the Wyndham Virginia Crossings Hotel and Retreat Center in Glen Allen.



EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY

Tips for giving and receiving criticism

By Darby Jones

Every day, church leaders provide feedback on sermons, graphic design, online content and more. Critiques can either ignite inspiration or, if delivered poorly, extinguish the creative spark and hinder productivity. Giving and receiving criticism is an art. Follow the tips below on how to give and receive professional criticism.

1. If you dish it out, be willing to take it.

Learning from helpful criticism is one of the most efficient ways to increase your skills. You do not always have to implement an idea but learn how to graciously accept it. If you decide the feedback does not align with the goals of the project, then you must have a conversation with those making it. For example, a graphic designer with integrity will strive to make the pastor or committee happy, while educating them about design process and what works visually.

Whether you take the advice or not, use the critique as a discussion starter for how best to express the message.

2. Find the good.

Always start your critique with something positive. This is the most important rule. Skip over the flaws at first and praise the strengths. As a general principle, first lift people up so they don't feel so let down when you

discuss a weakness.

Example: "This paragraph is clear and conversational. The imagery is colorful and vivid. However, one way to make this even stronger would be to delete some of the cliché phrases such as . . ."

At the same time, avoid switching back and forth between praise and criticism of the work. To do so, sends mixed messages.

3. Don't crash the party.

Some people cannot handle an uninvited critique. Remember, people are more important than a project. If educating people for whom your critique style does not work, it may be wise to focus more energy on those who embrace your feedback.

Be careful: Some people ask for feedback when they really mean praise. You will figure out quickly who is sincere and who is not. Do not waste time on those who only want their egos stroked.

4. Don't come empty-handed.

Bring something to the table by giving considerable time and thought to your feedback. If possible, offer opinions in person so you can see how it is received.

With written critiques, be sure to grant several reads to ensure you are taking enough time and have a good perspective to the piece. Off-the-cuff feedback is obvious to those who want honesty. Watered-

down or vague comments, even if positive, can be viewed negatively.

5. Critique the work, not the person.

Direct feedback toward the product, not the person. Always refer to the design, the sentence or the paragraph. Critique the work, not the one who produced it. Be both tactful and honest when pointing out flaws.

6. Leave your shoes at the door.

Thoughtful criticism involves separating personal preference from the quality of the work. Leave your preferences behind and be objective, even if the piece is not your style.

7. Help clean up afterward.

Explain shortfalls with grace. Avoid negative comments such as "this is wrong" or the one-word stinger, "boring." Instead, be positive and give suggestions such as: This would be better if . . . This paragraph could be more exciting if you . . .

If someone asks for your opinion, he or she respects it. So return the respect and critique in a way that is conducive to learning. When possible, offer concrete suggestions instead of vague ideas.

8. Say "thanks" the next day.

No matter how encouraging your words are, some people will feel hurt after hearing their work needs significant improvement. Some may give up. Be sure to check back in and see how they are doing. Ask if your comments were helpful and offer additional feedback only after a necessary revision or if invited to do so.

Writers, designers and leaders are generally emotionally attached to their ideas. Approach the opportunity to critique with care. Be prepared for awkward silence. Smile. It only lasts a few seconds. Soon giving constructive criticism will become natural. And those who love to learn will hit the road running with motivation. 🍷

— Darby Jones is eMarketing Manager at United Methodist Communications.



TECHNOLOGY TIPS



Using memes in church communications



Norman Group, on average only 28 percent of text is read in an online article. With eyetracking visualizations, it has been shown that users usually read website content in an F-shaped pattern: two horizontal lines and a vertical line.

Communications Toolbox

This is why memes are such a great resource to have in your arsenal as they allow you to quickly share information in an easily digestible way for the viewer.

A meme, by definition, is an image, video or sample of text that has the ability to be spread quickly to and by Internet users.

Are you in charge of your church's social media or communications? Memes can be a great way to share Scripture verses, quick facts, ideas or jokes with a format perfect for Facebook or Instagram.

Even United Methodist Communications is getting in on the trend with their Advent and Christmas-themed memes. You can visit them at www.um-com.org to download their pre-made memes to share the Word with your congregation and followers.

Creating a Meme

Photoshop is a great resource to make any meme or visual piece for your communications. But if you don't have Photoshop or know how to use this software, a good website to use is Canva, found at www.canva.com.

Canva is made for non-designers with pre-made templates, a drop and drag interface and a number of fonts. The website also has a new feature that helps you create infographics, another graphic that easily shows percentages, numbers and trends easily.

– Madeline Pillow is the editor of the Advocate.

By Madeline Pillow

Today, the way people get information and communicate is largely visual. You could say that pictures are now worth more than a thousand words.

Studies have shown how quickly people's eyes pass over a page for information as well as how quickly they scan an article or post before they stop reading.

When a user is on your website, the path of their eye starts at the upper left corner and moves from there.

According to a 2008 study by the Nielsen



"Technology Tips" is a new section of the Virginia Advocate. Here you can learn more about how to use technology to convey God's message on every level of the Church.

DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



▲ To celebrate his sixth birthday, Nathan Egeland decided he wanted to give rather than receive. He invited friends to his birthday party and asked that instead of bringing him gifts, they bring new socks for the homeless. After sharing the idea with the Rev. Leah DeLong, **Marshall-Middleburg UMC charge, Winchester District**, Nathan's idea was shared with the entire congregation. Oct. 25 was "Sock Sunday" at MUMC. Nathan collected over 260 pairs of socks! His family and others from the Marshall-Middleburg Charge joined Steve Jennings with Teens Opposing Poverty to take the socks, along with other supplies, to Washington, D.C., on Nov. 29 to distribute to the homeless.

On Saturday, Nov. 21, a group from **Main Street UMC, Suffolk**, spent the morning distributing food to families for Thanksgiving. Main Street collected 378 cans of corn as their part of the meal. Impact Suffolk is one of several initiatives employed by the congregation of Main Street to help others in the community. They also started the Friday night community suppers for the downtown area and have now recruited enough churches to serve a meal every Friday night. ►

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



▲ **Jamieson Memorial UMC, Farmville District**, works with 15 Clarksville churches and organizations to pack nutritional food items for 118 Clarksville Elementary School food-insecure children to take home each weekend. Long-time member Frances Vaughan shared with her Florida friend, Bonnie Mellott, the story of the Backpack Buddies program. What a surprise when the church received 120 hand-knit hats for Christmas gifts for the children. The amazing kindness of someone in Florida who worked so diligently to create beautiful hats for children in Virginia is a shining example of God's love exhibited to us by other people.



EVENTS



January

Candidacy Summit

Jan. 8-9, Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center, Blackstone

The Candidacy Summit is an event for considering or admitted candidates for ministry in the Virginia Conference. You must be a high school graduate to participate. All candidates are required to attend a Candidacy Summit prior to certification. Another Candidacy Summit will be held in July 2016. Prior to the Candidacy Summit, participants must complete a strengths discovery assessment and the River of Life Activity and bring both to the Summit. Registration is required 48 hours prior to the event in order to ensure sufficient materials are available for all participants. For more information or to register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. Or contact the Center for Clergy Excellence at (804) 521-1126 or 1-800-768-6040, ext. 126.

UMVIM Team Leader Training

Jan. 16, Bethany UMC, Rustburg, Lynchburg District
United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) Team Leader Training, required for all first-time UMVIM team leaders, will be held Saturday, Jan. 16, 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. at Bethany UMC, 2772 Bethany Rd., Rustburg, in the Lynchburg District. A \$55 registration fee, payable when you register, covers mandatory background check, team leader handbook from the Southeastern Jurisdiction and lunch. Continuing Education Units (0.5) will be provided for those needing CEU certification. Pre-registration is required by noon Monday, Jan. 11. For more information or to register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. Or contact the conference office of Justice and Missional Excellence at (804) 521-1139 or toll-free at 1-800-768-6040, ext. 139, or Forrest White, Virginia Conference UMVIM coordinator, at (804) 938-1026 or VirginiaUMVIM@gmail.com.

UMVIM Team Leader Recertification

Jan. 30, Burke UMC, Alexandria District
United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) Team Leader Recertification training will be offered 4-6 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 30, at Burke UMC, 6200 Burke Centre Pkwy., Burke, Alexandria District. This training is required for all UMVIM team leaders who completed basic team leader training five years ago or longer. Focus of this training is to update leaders on Virginia Conference UMVIM policies and guidelines, to share best practices and to answer any questions. At least five participants are needed to offer this training. A \$25 registration fee is payable when you regis-

ter. Note: This fee does not cover an optional team leader handbook, which will be available for purchase (\$20) at the training, or the new *A Mission Journey* book, which is available through Cokesbury. A meal will not be provided. All registrations must be in the office of Justice and Missional Excellence by noon Monday, Jan. 25. For more information or to register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. Or contact the office of Justice and Missional Excellence at (804) 521-1139 or toll-free at 1-800-768-6040, ext. 139, or Forrest White, Virginia Conference UMVIM Coordinator, at VirginiaUMVIM@gmail.com or (804) 938-1026.

February

United Methodist Day at the General Assembly

Feb. 4, Bon Air UMC and Capitol Square, Richmond

This annual event, sponsored by the conference Board of Church and Society and Virginia Conference United Methodist Women, is an opportunity to help faith communities become empowered to serve as missionaries of justice as well as the more traditional missionaries of mercy. Participants will gather Thursday, Feb. 4, at 7 a.m. at Bon Air UMC, 1645 Buford Rd., Richmond, for registration and breakfast and then travel together on buses to the General Assembly and Capitol Square where they will attend committee hearings and meet with legislators in order to advocate for social justice. At 12:30 p.m. participants will return to Bon Air UMC for lunch followed by speakers and discussion. The \$25 early bird price is available until Jan. 15. Registration increases to \$35 on Jan. 16. Final registration deadline is Jan. 29. Space is limited to 300 persons. For more information or to register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. Registration questions may be directed to Monica Sprague at (757) 766-9418 or monicaleighsprague@gmail.com. General questions may be directed to Pat Shipley at (804) 353-1387 or plsrev-doc@aol.com.

Clergy Ethics II Training

Feb. 18, Dayton UMC, Harrisonburg District

All clergy and certified church professionals are required to attend an Ethics II training during this quadrennium (2012-2016). The next training will be 9:30 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 18, at Dayton UMC, 215 Ashby St., Dayton, on the Harrisonburg District. Registration fee of \$12 includes lunch and training materials and is payable by credit card. For more information or to register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. Or contact the Center for Clergy Excellence at (804) 521-1126 or 1-800-768-6040, ext. 126. Registration is required 48 hours prior to the event in order to ensure

sufficient materials are available for all participants.

March

Bishop's Convocation on Prayer

March 5, Trinity UMC, Richmond

The Bishop's Convocation on Prayer will be held Saturday, March 5, at Trinity UMC, 903 Forest Ave., Richmond. Theme is Deepening Discipleship: Piety and Mercy through Prayer. Plenary speaker will be Dr. Frederick Schmidt, Reuben P. Job Associate Professor of Spiritual Formation at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, Ill. For more information or to register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date.

April

Ministers' Convocation

April 18-20, Virginia Crossings Wyndham Hotel & Conference Center, Glen Allen

Registration is now open for the 2016 Ministers' Convocation, "Come to the Table: Bringing Food and Faith Together," which will be held April 18-20 at Virginia Crossings Wyndham Hotel & Conference Center, 1000 Virginia Center Parkway, Glen Allen. This will be a time of Sabbath retreat, a time for fellowship together as ministry leaders, a time to be engaged in theological and academic conversation, and a time to be re-inspired for ministry. All clergy, diaconal ministers, and professional/paraprofessional certified ministers in the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church are invited. For more information or to register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date.

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The Virginia United Methodist

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THE LEAST OF THESE:



"IF YOU LOSE YOUR EAR TO
THE CRY OF THE POOR, YOU
WILL CRY OUT AND NOT BE
HEARD." PROVERBS 21:13

United Methodists' focus on poverty



Parishioners and guests gather for a meal at Seashore Mission United Methodist Church in Biloxi, Miss. Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS

The United Methodist Church has Four Areas of Ministry Focus in order to “express the vision and yearnings of the people” of the church. General Conference designated these areas of focus in 2008 so churches can better use their resources through their ministries.

One of these areas is engaging in ministry with the poor.

“Christ calls us to be in ministry with the poor and marginalized,” the United Methodist Church website says. “Our emphasis is on ‘with’ – standing with those who are regarded as the ‘least of these,’ listening to them, understanding their needs and aspirations and working with them to achieve their goals. It also means addressing the causes of poverty and responding in ways that lift up individuals and communities. United Methodists believe working side by side with those striving to improve their situation is more effective long-term than top-down charity.”

In the U.S., it has only been since World War II that a dominant, new city population required churches to face many issues of urban life from unemployment to huge economic differences (*What Every Church Member Should Know about Poverty* by Bill Ehlig and Ruby K. Payne).

There are different kinds of poverty as well as many reasons why people remain in poverty.

From differences in language, to difficult family structures and lack of resources, people in poverty have a number of rungs on the ladder to climb in order to escape their situation.

One of the most important lessons that churches can learn in helping people in poverty is to first listen. Everyone’s situation and background in life is different as well as the reasons for doing something. In the book, *What Every Church Member Should Know about Poverty*, the writers included a chart that lays out how the poor, the middle class and the wealthy view different resources, such as money, time, world view and driving forces. For example, those in poverty view food in terms of whether they have enough. Those in the middle class are more focused on quality and whether they enjoyed it. Those in the wealthier class are focused on the food’s presentation.

In this issue of the *Advocate*, we explore how Virginia Conference churches are working with those in poverty. To learn more about poverty in the U.S. and the world, visit www.ministrywith.org.



MINISTRY WITH POOR SHOULD INCLUDE DEEPER INTERACTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS

By Dave Rochford

A great many United Methodist churches on my district have significant food pantry and meal-provision ministries – a truly worthy undertaking, after the example of the one who said, “you give them something to eat” (Mt. 14:16). These efforts require hard work and are willingly, even gladly, performed.

But sometimes, as the bins are being put away and the floors swept, you will hear a quiet lament: “You know, we almost never see any of the folks we help during the week come on Sunday to worship with us.”

This seems to point to a disconnect between our theology of mission and the praxis of our “outreach” as it relates to reaching and making new disciples. Our efforts with lower-income persons, well-intentioned as we may be, frequently yield interactions that are too cursory and transactional to bring new lives into the fold of Grace. Too often we are meeting the poor of our communities without connecting in a transformative, invitational way

that challenges the kingdoms of this world – kingdoms given boundaries and power by subtleties of social caste, affluence, education and the like. That these barriers are allowed to stand undercuts what could be radical Grace – for the giver and the recipient, the visitor and the familiar.

Concerning the challenge of welcoming into our fellowship those from the neediest households of our parishes, I recently talked with “Laura,” who lives in Section 8 housing – as well as under constant pressure posed by mounting debt and the fear of losing her home. When I ask her how financial distress has impacted her spiritual life, Laura shares: “I struggle with faith. I pray every day, but it often feels like God can’t hear me or ignores my prayers. I don’t understand why God would allow the devastating and traumatic things that have happened all my life.” [Here, Laura references having been prostituted by her mother, several sexual assaults she has endured as an adult, having no safe place to live at times and the recurrence of a cancer that has greatly exacerbated her economic crisis.]

Clearly, Laura needs a church! And, in fact, she has at times courageously sought one, but has ultimately been unable to find lasting connection. When I ask her about this she minces no words: “Every church I’ve attended, I don’t feel like I fit in. I don’t find others who are constantly fighting to not become homeless again, or who have the intense financial fears I fight on a daily basis. I don’t connect with people who are talking about their vacations, cruises, travel and so forth. It’s like they have no understanding of fighting to survive. It’s extremely hard to make friends with those that don’t understand this, or don’t struggle as much financially.”

Then she puts a fine point on it: “It’s a constant struggle – and stressful and so very lonely to live this way.”

Saying this, she immediately reminds me of what a Brazilian theologian shared many years ago at a conference on global poverty. After a breakout session, during which attendees tried to come up with a definition of Poverty (“that condition in which a person cannot afford to provide for her/his basic human needs”), the Brazilian smiled sadly and offered something like this: “Perhaps this might help. Imagine that you were to learn today that while you were away, your home and all your possessions burned. Through a misunderstanding, you also have discovered that everything you have in the bank has been frozen, and – ah! – you have even lost your job. Now I ask you, how





“And that is why you will never know what it means to be poor: when you are poor, you are poor in relationships. None of the people you know can help you.”

long would it take for you 1) to obtain your next meal, 2) to find a place to sleep for tonight and 3) to get another job?” After a pause, he answered, “most of you were probably thinking it would take only a moment to obtain a meal, perhaps a few minutes to find a place to stay. And maybe, at most, a few weeks to find another job of some kind. This is because you thought of your friends and your family helping you. And that is why you will never know what it means to be poor: when you are poor, you are poor in relationships. None of the people you know can help you.”

This takes us right away to the remarkable, but somewhat unexplored, wisdom that Christ shared with his disciples, who were aghast after their master warned that it is incredibly difficult for a wealthy person to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. “Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life” (Mk. 10:29-30).

Clearly, the hundred-fold blessing to be enjoyed in the present age comes from becoming part of a new community, one that regards relationship and reckons wealth quite differently from the ways of the world.

What is the implication for us as we seek to “engage in ministry with the poor” as a renewed area of focus of our connectional Church? It’s not going to be easy. Those who live at or below the poverty line – and it is more of us all the time – are quite often barely able to receive the best of what the Church has to offer. These are focused on “fighting to survive,” and find precious little rest from that fight-or-flight existence. What is most needful, for them, is the shelter found in loving relationships. So I would suggest that each United Methodist committed to being in ministry with the poor befriend a person who lives in a state of dire financial hardship. That friendship may challenge both parties. But its authenticity could bring otherworldly Grace, by which we may just forget who was the needy one and remember Who really is the Giver. 🍷

– The Rev. Dave Rochford is the Staunton District superintendent.

SOME KEY POINTS ABOUT POVERTY



Poverty and wealth are relative. We basically know our own poverty or wealth only in relationship to others.

Poverty occurs in all races and countries. The notion of a middle class as a large segment of society is a phenomenon of the past 100 years. In the United States the largest group of individuals in poverty is children under the age of 18. If one counts the number of children in poverty or very close to it, the number is close to 50 percent. One of the biggest misconceptions is the difference between percentages and numbers. The greatest number of children in poverty are white, but the greatest percentage of children in poverty is by minority group.

Generational and situational poverty are different. It generally takes two generations to make the transition from middle class into poverty. When an individual has been in poverty two generations or more, then the patterns and habits are different. Situational poverty is when there is a divorce, death or illness and resources are temporarily reduced, but the mindset remains largely with middle-class norms and values.

For churches to be successful with the poor, members must understand the hidden rules of generational poverty, as well as middle class, so the transition can be more readily accepted. For the transition to occur, both sets of rules must be openly acknowledged.

The fundamental reasons for poverty are lack of educational attainment and the disconnection of family and/or community.

Four reasons one leaves poverty: It’s too painful to stay, a vision or goal, a key relationship or a special talent or skill.

–Found in *What Every Church Member Should Know about Poverty*.



SERVICE WORSHIP AT BRADDOCK STREET UMC SENDS MEMBERS TO WORK IN COMMUNITY

By Joanna Dietz

Four times a year, members of **Braddock Street UMC, Winchester**, gather somewhere in the community. They call it Service Worship. It happens on a Sunday morning while the three worship services are occurring and lasts into the early part of the afternoon. A lead team prepares the site for workers, so when they arrive they can jump right into the work. People are encouraged to come for worship and then join the church family out in the community caring for specific agencies.

Sharen Gromling, who began the idea of Service Worship with the encouragement of Braddock Street's lead pastor, the Rev. Kirk Nave, finds that the program is both a lesson and action together. "Service Worship is a hybrid of hearing a message and taking that message to the street in the form of service to others," said Gromling. "Instead of just going to church, we become the church – we go out into the community and worship God and witness to others through our service."


Some Service Worshipships have included C-CAP (Congregation Community Action Project), putting together Ebola health kits for UMCOR and cleaning up at Henry and Wil-

liam Evans Home (a home for children).

Braddock Street's latest project occurred at Our Health Campus, an agency that provides support for non-profits that meet the needs of those living in poverty in Winchester. On Sept. 13, 2015, 65 "Braddock Streeters" came to paint both inside and outside, landscape, create care bags for children who are in crisis, clean windows and spruce up the campus. The work they did saved the campus an estimated \$10,000 which allowed them to use those funds for direct work with the poor.

Coming together helps the church learn more about what different agencies in the community are doing to make a difference, but it also fosters deeper relationships with those agencies and those they serve. After working with the children and staff at Evans Home, many participants found other ways to continue supporting the home and invited the children to join the church in mission as well.

Braddock Street's next Service Worship will be on Sunday, Jan. 31, when they will have a Stop Hunger Now event at the church. In April, they will participate in a build with Habitat for Humanity, which is working hard to provide opportunities for all ages, such as landscaping (Habitat's general rule is 16 years and up on worksites).

When people understand poverty and begin to form relationships with the "other," suddenly, we don't seem quite so different from one another. Mission should be about making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. This only happens when we learn more about one another and recognize the gifts that God has given every single person to share. Service Worship helps to make this reality. 

– The Rev. Joanna Dietz is Minister of Mission and Service at Braddock Street UMC, Winchester District.



Members of Warwick Memorial UMC help with yard-work during a "blitz workday."

WARWICK MEMORIAL EXTENDS 'HANDS ACROSS THE CITY'

By Gina Anderson-Cloud and Bert Cloud

"What can we do to care for our neighbors?" became a question that worked in and out of conversations among the people of **Warwick Memorial United Methodist Church in Newport News**.

Already very active in a number of mission efforts locally and abroad, a longing had been developing in the



Members of Warwick Memorial UMC help with yardwork during a "blitz workday."

hearts of many to reach beyond our walls directly into the lives of our immediate neighbors. Quite simply, our hope is to offer hands-on service to help our community become a better place.

So, after a lot of prayer, some divinely inspired networking and many what-if conversations, we began an ongoing, local mission project called Hands Across The City in the spring of last year. We drew the name from a mission campaign of the same name developed by Rethink Church, but it has become our own as our local projects have stretched our hands across our city.

We first explored the needs and opportunities to serve which led to partnerships with the City of Newport News and the Homeowners Association of a sprawling residential community known as Courthouse Green.

This neighborhood has experienced a lot of cultural transition along with economic stress and a spike in crime. With many residents that were sincere, hard-working people needing help with yard work and exterior home repairs, we canvassed the Courthouse Green neighborhood and introduced ourselves and our church to the community in early May 2015. By the end of the month, we had gathered 35 volunteers, ranging in age from four to 75 with various skills, for our first "blitz workday" serving six homes owned by people with low incomes, older adults or persons with disabilities.

Our second "blitz workday", held in October, put nearly 50 people to work serving seven homes owned by our neighbors in need. Our work also including a major trash cleanup of a large wooded area done by a team comprised mostly of members of our confirmation class who were learning about living out their

faith.

"Blitz workday" projects included yard cleaning and landscaping along with significant repairs to roofs, fences, doors, windows and shutters. Materials have been provided through a mission grant from our church's endowment fund along with private donations. In addition to the site crews, "blitz workday" volunteers also prepared lunches and managed supplies. Many volunteers were already connected to our church, but some were invited by friends and just wanted to help make a difference.

We have also had smaller "Hands Across the City" work projects in the Courthouse Green community, generally a focused repair project with a team of two or three.

While the Courthouse Green neighborhood has been the focus of many projects, "Hands Across the City" volunteers have also partnered with Habitat for Humanity for projects in the southern part of Newport News and staffed a summer feeding program for neighborhood children, among other projects. We also continue our support of a local financial ministry, food banks and meal programs.

As satisfying as tackling these projects can be, it is the relationships that we are forming with our neighbors that are so important and valuable. We have come to connect faces and stories with each other as human beings and fellow citizens.

We have come to know a little bit more about the struggles and hopes of people like a dignified school custodian who will soon retire with a home that she has worked hard to maintain for many years but still needs help.

We have been honored by cautious, but distinctively gracious, hospitality of a family coping with disabling illness while their home crumbles around them.

Certainly, we have been privileged to spend an afternoon cleaning a backyard only to witness a grieving home owner step into it for the first time in four years because it held too many hard memories of a deceased family member.

We dream of continuing this work, and we are excited about the development of leaders and new volunteers. We recently participated in the Courthouse Green Community day and brought along nurses to check blood pressure and promote a healthy lifestyle. This Christmas, our youth will go caroling at the homes we served. And, currently, we are praying about more ways to foster relationships, possibly through mentoring, tutoring and sport camps.

We believe that Christ, whose hands have been at work in Courthouse Green and throughout the rest of our city for a very long time, is indeed answering our heart's longing to put our hands to use. 🍷

— The Rev. Gina Anderson-Cloud and the Rev. Bert Cloud serve as co-pastors at Warwick Memorial UMC in Newport News.



DANVILLE D.S. URGES CHURCHES TO ADDRESS ISSUE OF CHILD POVERTY

By Madeline Pillow

It was February 2012 when Danville District Superintendent Janine Howard sat down to write an article for the district newsletter about United Methodist polity in light of church transitions, a new episcopal leader and the approaching General Conference. For Howard, "This seemed to be a good time to get started with an explanation about who we are and why we do things the way we do."

But she was stopped in the middle of this act by some news she read from Martinsville that ranked the city as having the third highest child poverty rate in 2010 among Virginia's 134 counties. With a rate of 41.7 percent of children under the age of 18, Danville had Virginia's highest child poverty rate in 2010. (Article by Paul Collins, *Martinsville Bulletin*, Jan. 19, 2012.)

In her newsletter, Howard urged churches to address the issue and combat the conditions. For her, it was about combining The United Methodist Church's strong tradition of ministry with the poorest of society and living up to the Mission Statement "for the transformation of the world." With a challenge and a call for action, Howard asked her churches to meet about the issue and then let her know how they would respond.

This newsletter stirred the district on the issue and many asked for resources and information. The book, *What Every Church Member Should Know About Poverty*

was recommended as a resource from which grew several local church initiatives. Also "Bridges Out of Poverty" workshops were started, and the district is in the beginning stages of forming Discipleship Circles based around poverty as well as Church and Community Workers ministry with Global Ministries.

One of those affected by the newsletter was the Rev. Kameron

Wilds, then pastor of **Grace Design UMC in Danville.**

"Grace Design has really been trying to seek out who God is calling them to be in Danville, Virginia," Wilds said. "In the four years that I was with them our goal was to follow Jeremiah's command to the Israelites who were held in captivity in Babylon, to seek the welfare of the land, for in its welfare we will find our own. We tried to keep perspective though. Just as the Israelites were in Babylon, we, too, realized that finding the welfare of the city was not going to be easy, but nonetheless, every church is called to try." In addressing the D.S.'s challenge to do something about Danville's child poverty rate, the church set out on two mission projects.

One of these projects is the "Feed My Sheep" lunch where, once a month, volunteers from Grace Design pack 200-250 lunches with a focus on the community of Cardinal Village, a Section 8 housing community.

The other project is a partnership with **Trinity UMC, Danville**, that resulted from a conversation between Wilds and the Rev. Charles Wickham, pastor of Trinity UMC.

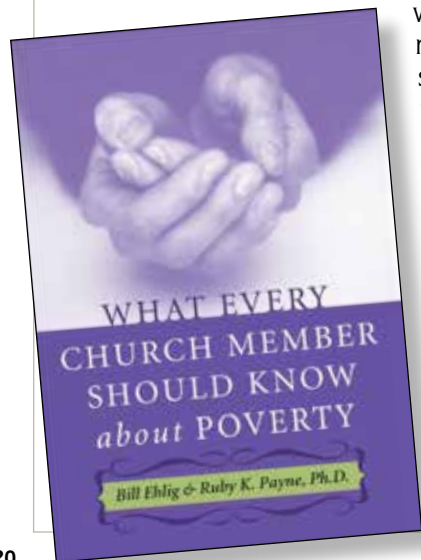
"One day, Kameron came to see me, and he said that he had a crazy idea but he wanted to tell me all about it," Wickham said. "He envisioned our local United Methodist churches starting a thrift store together, and all the monies would be used to help people with their utilities, rent and other needs. We talked about it for awhile, and then he said that he had even looked at a location."

Through one of Wilds' church members, Bobby Thompson, they were able to get a shopping center store in an easily-accessible location. Talking with other clergy and two other churches, they were able to cover initial set-up costs to create "The Helping Hands Thrift Store," a 501c3 that sells donated goods and clothing. The store is staffed by non-paid volunteers which allows the monies that are raised to be used for small overhead costs and to provide financial assistance to people in the community in need.

After only a few months, they were out of space, and once again Thompson helped them get a bigger space in the same shopping center.

Wickham says the community has been very supportive of the efforts and many volunteer to help in the store which has allowed the store to provide financial assistance to people in many ways.

"Since we have been open, we have assisted in utilities, rent, a funeral, purchased materials for a ramp, tokens for bus transportation for job interviews, prescriptions, glasses, dentures and other needs," said Wickham. "The relationships that have been built are wonderful. From the very beginning, we have stressed to the volunteers that when someone enters the front doors until they get in their car and drive away, we want them to meet Jesus." 





BRIDGES *out of* POVERTY



By Susan Hughes

In early 2013, **Redwood UMC, Danville District**, was hungering for a new outreach ministry that would serve the poor in a new way and would be more than just a “giving” charity. We wanted to make a difference in people’s lives. This desire was the result of several things that had been happening in our church.

First, we had been working for several years on becoming a “simple church” as outlined in the book with the same title by Eric Geiger and Thom Rainer. Our church mission was clearly defined as “to connect the unconnected to a community of faith where Jesus Christ transforms them into world-changing disciples,” and the discipleship process we adopted was Love God -> Love Others -> Serve the World. We had accomplished the first two with worship and small groups, and these were thriving.

We next wanted to focus on serving the world. How could we do this better and effect lasting change?

As part of my seminary training, I participated in an immersion trip to **Rising Hope Mission Church in Alexandria** and served the poor and the homeless for two weeks that January. We also had a new member come to our church with a vision for ministry to the poor. She had been part of what the Roanoke District was doing with Bridges Out of Poverty and brought some ideas to us right as I came back fired up from my immersion experience.

Our Outreach Ministry Team decided to embark on a visioning process and saw a need to educate the entire church on the problem of poverty and our role in this problem. We decided the church needed its own immersion to understand the issue and how we could best serve the poor by first seeking to understand rather than assuming to know what they need. So, we wrote a grant to our district to help fund our immersion which became a church-wide study based on the book *What Every Church Member Should Know About Poverty*. The study happened in five different adult small groups in the fall of 2013. About 60

people participated. Facilitators were trained to lead each group in a discussion specifically about how what we were learning applied to our church.

It was a little painful to have our eyes opened to how ignorant we were about our own church culture and expectations for others to assimilate. We immediately made necessary changes in basic things: directions around the church, hospitality and explanations for the obvious, such as words for the Lord’s Prayer displayed on the screen and printed in the bulletin.

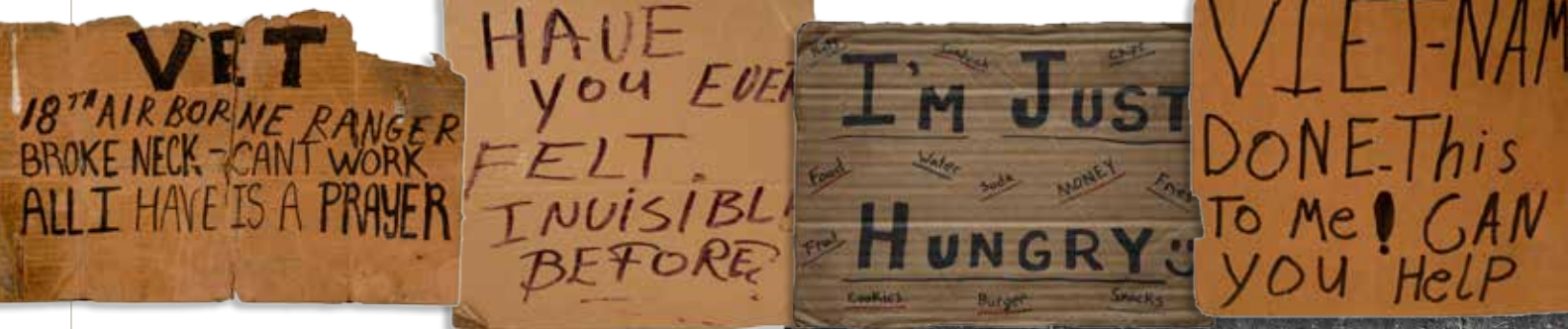
But we also came together for an intentional time of visioning and planning. Specifically, as part of our simple church model, how were we as disciples serving the world, connecting the unconnected and empowering them to become disciples/servants as well? Our visioning kept the simple church model in mind. We talked about new ministries that would serve the poor but help to make lasting change rather than provide just a bandage.

We clearly understood that basic needs must be met for people before they can think about change, but there are resources in our community that are already meeting basic needs. For example, we have food banks and clothing shelters. Our church wanted to meet a need that wasn’t being met.

The same time of our visioning, I attended the Bridges Out of Poverty training in November 2013 and was able to bring these concepts to our conversation. After looking at all options, we collectively decided to launch the Getting Ahead workshop as part of our Wednesday night ministry. The GA model fit well into our existing ministry, as we serve a meal that evening and provide child care and small groups. This helps GA class participants be welcomed into community life with our congregation rather than be separated in a solitary class on a lone night.

Each class costs approximately \$6,000 since participants are paid to attend. This is part of the GA model for helping

(Continued on pg. 22: “BRIDGES”)




("BRIDGES," continued from pg. 21)

individuals to build resources. Rather than give someone money for their light bill, they earn \$25 each week (in gift card form) as they learn. GA defines poverty as "the extent to which an individual does without resources." We learned the four contributing factors/causes of poverty (individual choice and behavior is just one factor). The class helped participants, called investigators, to learn about their own "story" and do a self-assessment of their resources.

We offered the first workshop in fall 2014 with 12 investigators and graduated 10 of those. Then in winter/spring 2015 we had nine investigators and graduated seven. This fall, we have 12 investigators. People who attend come from a variety of referrals: some are involved with our Celebrate Recovery ministry on Fridays, and others are referred to us from local community agencies. The workshops are for anyone who is living in unstable circumstances. GA guidelines recommend participants who are living below 200 percent of the federal poverty line.

THIS MINISTRY AND FOCUS HAS BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN TRANSFORMATION WITHIN OUR CHURCH BY PROVIDING THE MUCH-NEEDED OPEN DOOR TO MINISTRY WITH THE POOR. PEOPLE ARE LEARNING ABOUT BOTH THESE PROGRAMS AND BEING DRAWN IN. WE HAVE SEEN AN INCREASE IN PROFESSIONS OF FAITH AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP FROM BOTH OF THESE PROGRAMS. OUR CHURCH HAS REALLY EMBRACED BEING IN RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY IN THESE WAYS.

I have learned quite a bit from the workshop myself, and it has changed my view of poverty, of people and of our culture that is so ignorant to many things. It has given me such a better perspective on things. Others who have assisted in class feel the same way. 

– Susan Hughes is a member of Redwood UMC, a provisional deacon and a trained facilitator for the "Bridges Out of Poverty" curriculum.

POVERTY IN THE UNITED STATES

Poverty does not just affect "those people over there" across the world. Severe poverty exists in the United States as well. One in four children are at risk of hunger, and, among African-Americans and Latinos, one in three children is at risk of hunger. (Household Food Security in the United States, 2008 PDF Icon. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, November 2009 [Table 1B, Table 6].) The number of people in the U.S. who live in poverty is increasing to record levels as the gap between rich and poor continues to grow.



The official U.S. poverty rate in 2009 was 14.3 percent, an increase from the year before. There were 43.6 million people in poverty; 50.7 million had no health insurance. (Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2009, U.S. Bureau of the Census.)



Most Americans (51.4 percent) will live in poverty at some point before the age of 65. (Urban Institute, Transitioning In and Out of Poverty, 2007) Of Americans over 65 years of age who live alone, 15.6 percent exist below the poverty line. (Global Action on Aging)

Eighty-four percent of low-income families have at least one working family member, and 75 percent of single mothers who lead households are employed outside the home. (U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2007)





An increase in homelessness in the first decade of the 21st century was accompanied by a decrease in real income and a sharp increase in housing foreclosures. (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2011) In 2009, the home foreclosure rate was 10,420 per day.



About half of all American children will receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits at some point before age 20. ("Estimating the Risk of Food Stamp use and Impoverishment During Childhood," Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, Vol. 163, No. 11, November 2009.) More than 90 percent of the benefits received through the SNAP are used by the third week of the month. (Analysis of Food Stamp Benefit Redemption Patterns, Fig. 4. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, June 2006)



The percentage of SNAP households with no income increased from seven percent in 1989 to 18 percent in 2009. (U.S. Department of Agriculture)



Low-income households spend a greater share of their income on food. Food accounts for 17.1 percent of spending for households making less than \$10,000 per year compared to the U.S. average of 12.6 percent. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey, 2006)



Voluntary food pantries – many church-related – have become part of the "safety-net" for the poor in the U.S., with more than 37 million people in 2010 being fed through them. (Feeding America 2010 Report)



The highest percentages of poverty, above 16 percent, in 2010 were concentrated in a band of states extending from Arizona to West Virginia (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010)



Foreign-born women are more likely than foreign-born men to live in poverty; 18.3 percent compared to 15.2 percent; 16.8 percent of all foreign-born people live in poverty. (Migration Information Source)

AT A GLANCE

46.7 million

(14.8% in 2014)
people living in poverty in the U.S. with a household income of under \$24,230 for a family of four. 15.5 million of those are children.



1 in 5

(21.1% in 2014)
children in the U.S. live in poverty.

25.4%
(2011)

% of households without sufficient net worth to subsist at poverty level for three months in absence of income.

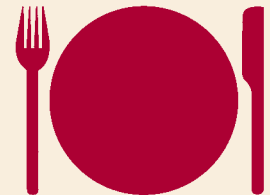


31%
(2015)

of U.S. families in poverty are headed by single mothers.

48.1 million
(14% of households in 2014)

Americans lived in food insecure households, where they run out of money and food in any given month. This includes 32.8 million adults and 15.3 million children.



"Young people can virtually assure that they and their families will avoid poverty if they follow three elementary rules for success – complete at least a high school education, work full time, and wait until age 21 and get married before having a baby. Based on an analysis of Census data, people who followed all three of these rules had only a 2 percent chance of being in poverty and a 72 percent chance of joining the middle class (defined as above \$55,000 in 2010.)"

– Ron Haskins of the Brookings Institution, testifying before Congress on June 5, 2012.



RICHMOND PROGRAM ASSURES SHELTER FOR HOMELESS

CARITAS is the largest provider of homeless services in the Metro Richmond area. The word stands for “Congregations Around Richmond Involved To Assure Shelter” and is there for those who are on a journey to self-sufficiency.

CARITAS is made up of the largest and most inclusive emergency shelter in the area, a Furniture Bank, Works program and the Healing Place that all work together to move individuals from homelessness to productive lives. The shelter of CARITAS helps serve individuals and families who might in other systems fall through the cracks. A lot of federal and local funding is focused towards Rapid Re-housing which does not always meet the homeless where they are now or disqualifies them.

With congregations’ support, CARITAS uses its resources to help people in a number of areas.

Many churches throughout the year provide food, housing and care to the area homeless throughout the year. In order to help meet the needs, churches in the Metro Richmond area can sign up for a week to host homeless and house them at their church for a week. Two churches

in the Virginia Conference who work with CARITAS are **Chester UMC** and **Reveille UMC**. Both churches hosted families this fall.

Reveille has worked with CARITAS for about 20 years, and Chester began working with them in 2002 when the mission coordinator at the time introduced the idea as a ministry to the church.

“I have to say that at first we were anxious about having these strangers in our church building but it was and continues to be such a blessing,” said Julie Ferry who was the coordinator for CARITAS at Chester UMC for many years. “We witness the faith of our guests in their vulnerable and difficult life situations. Also, witnessing the gifts and the talents of our church members at work for the ‘least of these’ is awesome. We have learned to trust God in the planning and implementing of this ministry because we could not do it without Him,” said Ferry.

For those involved with the program at Reveille, it allows participants to get out of their own mindsets, to ask “Who is our neighbor?” and respond as Christ would.

Churches also donate furniture and home goods to the CARITAS Furniture Bank, a place that helps these individuals have furniture when they get back on their feet. Both these churches have drives once a year to collect furniture. Reveille started a “Fill a Pod” drive a few years ago, where they fill a POD (Portable On-Demand Storage Unit) with furniture and other goods by advertising to the congregation, weekday school and surrounding neighborhoods.

To learn more about CARITAS and what they provide and how you can help, visit <http://caritasva.org>.





UNA FAMILIA HELPS IMMIGRANT (CHILDREN ON EASTERN SHORE

By Verónica Barrell



Una Familia (One Family) is a ministry of the **Eastern Shore District** meeting the needs of children of impoverished areas in Accomack County. The ministry began in 2011 when **Melfa UMC** opened its doors to host a community service project for high schooler Lupe Marquez who desired to offer tutoring to elementary school children. She, as an immigrant, experienced struggles early in school and knew the children would benefit.

Una Familia was formalized as a district ministry in 2013, compelled by the love of Christ to support the education of migrant/immigrant children and build relationships with the growing Hispanic/Latino community.

Originally, students were transported from Dreamland I, a large trailer park in Accomack County, about seven miles to Melfa UMC for a meal and tutoring, then returned home. The program grew quickly from an original five students to 50+. Una Familia acquired a 15-passenger van, as did Melfa UMC, but still several trips had to be made. Volunteers were recruited from the district United Methodist churches.

In an effort to meet the needs of the growing number of children from different school districts, in 2014 the County School Board approved a request to use school buses to transport the children to different tutoring sites that were within their districts, thus alleviating the transportation issues somewhat. There were three sites last year serving two elementary schools, and this year we anticipate five sites serving three elementary schools. There are already more than 80 children registered, and an increase is anticipated as new sites become known. The sites now include Episcopal churches, too, and our volunteer base is also ecumenical.

Parents who are unable to assist their children with



homework due to language, education or work issues are very grateful for the support. Children's grades are improving and they are passing their SOLs. They are also being encouraged and strengthened in their studies. Parents also have the opportunity to participate in English classes at Melfa UMC.

During the summers, Una Familia and the district have supported two college-age interns, who (along with volunteers) go into the various migrant camps and trailer parks to engage the children in play, crafts, day camp at Camp Occohonack, day trips to the zoo, etc., family cook-outs and ecumenical events. As the migrant worker families arrive in early summer, Una Familia provides health kits (which include sunscreen and hats).

Most recently, Una Familia has begun a ministry with high school and college-age students. This ministry seeks to continue to encourage and support students with college/career exploration, preparation for SATs, college applications and financial aid applications, as well as time for fellowship.

Una Familia envisions growing different areas of ministry in order to meet other migrant/immigrant needs, including the middle school students who have "out-grown" the elementary tutoring program. Participating in a network of migrant/immigrant service providers on the Eastern Shore allows for appropriate referrals as well as evaluation of potential areas of need which are presently un-met.

Presently the ministry is made viable by dedicated volunteers coordinated by the board of Una Familia. We are exploring the need for paid staff to provide consistent, accountable coordination and networking. 🍀

– The Rev. Verónica Barrell is an elder in the Virginia Conference and chair of the Una Familia Board.

Devotions from International Lesson Series

LIVING THE WORD



The Rev. Dr. Justin Allen is the dean of Spiritual Life and director of the Institute for Church Professions at Shenandoah University in Winchester. He joined the Shenandoah University community in April 2011 where the mission of the Institute for Church Professions is to call, form and send leaders for tomorrow's church and world.

Justin received his Bachelor of Arts (magna cum laude) from Greensboro College in North Carolina. He received his M.Div. and his PhD from Wesley Theological Seminary. In 2009, Justin graduated with his PhD in Church Leadership Excellence with a focus on campus ministries and the changing dynamics of annual conferences and extension ministries.

In 2004, after three years as associate pastor of Emmanuel UMC in Memphis, Tenn., he became executive director and campus minister of The Wesley Foundation at The University of Memphis. Justin transferred into the Virginia Conference in 2011 after 10 years in the Memphis Conference. Justin and his wife, Dr. Alethea Allen, a pediatrician and seminary graduate, have three children, Camdyn, Charlie and Carter.

January 3, 2016

Biblical Marriage
Genesis 29:15-30

Throughout 2015 our system of government and our churches wrestled with what constitutes a marriage, a legal marriage. I find it interesting then that the first four weeks of the year from The New International Lesson focus on marriage in the Bible. I am glad we are finally going to talk about biblical marriage! After all, I am tired of our society ruining the sacred nature of biblical marriage. This scripture is clear, we should have multiple wives and they should be our cousins!

Believing in a deeper, more profound sanctity of scripture, believing that the Bible speaks to us in our context, what can we glean from these sacred scriptures? Perhaps the scriptures are talking to us about a Hebrew Bible understanding of karma. After all, Jacob is the one that deceived his brother, Esau, and his father, Isaac. Now, perhaps, Jacob can understand the pain that deception causes as he is tricked into marrying Leah instead of Rachel. Perhaps each of the seven years he now has a chance to repent, a chance to reflect on his deception in light of how he has been deceived.

Perhaps the key theme is "patience is truly a virtue," one that is not often realized in our contemporary society. Many people say that Job had patience, but really, he just lamented and wailed at God for chapter after chapter (I might do so also after such traumatic loss). Now Jacob, he had patience, 14 years of it!

In a society of instant gratification, can we look at Jacob and imagine how the 14 years of work might have been a good thing, a journey toward God, a repentance for past action? I think that most of the time we reflect on the actions of others and how they have wronged us. What was our role in the situation? How could we have handled it differently? "Statistics show that in Western cultures, 40 to 50 percent of first marriages end in divorce" (The New International Lesson Annual 199). How can we strengthen marriages today? I think the first place would be to look at ourselves, ask for forgiveness and serve our spouse as Christ served us.

Or, perhaps, the message is much simpler: marriage has changed over time as society has changed.

January 10, 2016

Let's Talk About Sex, Baby!
Song of Solomon 6:4-12

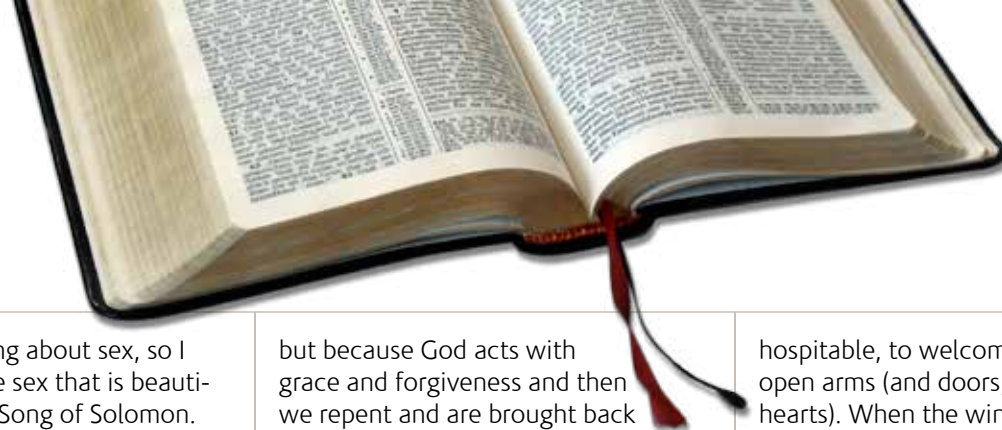
I once tried using this scripture as a romantic poem with one of my girlfriends. I did say "once." She broke up with me the next day saying my breath smelled like an oxen trudging through the mire.

I also once mocked society's obsession with Fifty Shades of Grey and called a small group "Fifty Shades of Solomon." I did say "once." At least the small group had street cred. After all the jokes about the ancient pick-up lines in Song of Solomon, there is one truth that remains, the patriarchs and matriarchs of our faith chose to include this book in the 66 books that make up our canon. Why?

We are quick to talk about everyone else's sexuality but slow to see our own. We could immediately shut down this book and toss it from our personal canon within the canon. After all, these two young people talking to each other are not married. It seems clear that while they fancy each other's attractiveness, they are also talking about the act of sex. Forty years in the church and I have never heard a sermon about Song of Solomon and I have only given one! The Song of Solomon is part of our wisdom literature, but it seems to provide wisdom that we would like to ignore. There is value in this book, but we have to be willing to talk about sex. It is time to be the counter-cultural Church and talk about the beauty of sex inside the covenant of marriage.

When I was a youth director at Burke UMC in northern Virginia, we did a human sexuality weekend. I remember looking at Genesis 1 and pointing out to every giddy middle school student that each day was described as "good" except for the sixth day and it was "very good." That was the day that God made humanity and told us to be fruitful and multiply. The day God told us to have sex was the only "very good" day!

One year I asked the students in the Christian Leadership course that I teach at Shenandoah University if they have ever talked about sex in church. They all busted up laughing. Sex is prevalent throughout the Bible, and many times it is not consensual sex. I have a 12-year-old daughter, and her chances of living a life without sexual violence are not great. I want her to feel



comfortable talking about sex, so I talk about sex, the sex that is beautifully portrayed in Song of Solomon.

It seems to me that Song of Solomon provides us a unique opportunity to talk to our communities about God's very good creation—sex.

January 17, 2016

Initial Mover or Passive Reactor

Hosea 1

So far in January we have had sacred texts that have illuminated marriage, sex and, now, adultery. However, this adultery is not Gomer's, but ours. We have fallen short in our covenantal relationship with God.

God tells Hosea to name his three children Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah, and Lo-ammi. Lo-ruhamah means "no pity" and Lo-ammi means "not your God." Honestly, I wonder why Hosea did not barter with God like Lot did! "How about the name Lisa instead of Lo-ammi? Lisa seems a little less detrimental to my child's self-esteem."

It is clear that God is not happy with the Israelites. The covenant made between God and God's people with words like "I am your God and you are my people" is reversed with the name of Gomer and Hosea's third child. It seems that God has had enough of our idolatrous and adulterous ways. Hope for the covenantal relationship between God and God's people is fading fast. However, as fast as it hits rock bottom, hope once again is restored as God says "and in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' it shall be said to them, 'Children of the living God'" (Hosea 1:10b NRSV).

Who is the prime mover in our relationship with God? Surely it is not us, but God. Despite all of our sin, despite all of our worship of other gods, God acts in hope and promise for our future. God's decision to call us "children of the living God" is not because we have repented and become good,

but because God acts with grace and forgiveness and then we repent and are brought back into right relationship with God. God acts, we respond.

In our relationships—marital, friendships, professional and more—are we the initial mover or the one that waits for others to act? Do we react or are we proactively seeking to be in right relationship with others? It seems that God is setting the example for all of us in our relationships.

January 24, 2016

Hospitality, Hospitality, Hospitality

John 2:1-12

It is appropriate as we round out this series on marriage that we talk about Jesus. How does God incarnate, God with flesh on engage the marriage celebration? It seems that Jesus is the guest that saves the party.

When I was growing up we had Pepsi in the fridge, but never any alcohol—no beer, no wine, not even a Seagram's Golden Wine Cooler or a Zima. Our family decision to keep alcohol out of the house was directly tied to our faith as United Methodists. Therefore, the first few times I read this scripture, I read it backwards. I kept thinking that Jesus turned 150 gallons of wine into water, but instead it was the other way around. Why would Jesus provide 150 gallons of wine on the third day of a party where the expectation was that people would be getting drunk (John 2:10 NRSV)?

What are the three most important things about real estate? Location, location and location. The three most important things about God? Hospitality, hospitality and hospitality. There are so many stories in our scriptures about welcoming the one on the fringes—the stranger, the alien, the widow, the orphan, the possessed, the sick, the imprisoned, the hungry, the thirsty and so on. God calls us to be

hospitable, to welcome people with open arms (and doors, and minds and hearts). When the wine ran out, Jesus intervened. He did not do just enough to help them skate by and avoid embarrassment for running out of wine, he had six jars filled to the brim—150 gallons of good wine!

When we baptize a child in the Church, it becomes the responsibility of the Church to raise that child. When we celebrate a wedding in the Church, it becomes the responsibility of the Church to support that marriage. How are we strengthening marriage in our churches? Are we providing hospitality to strengthen the marriage covenant that is lived out by so many people in our church? Maybe we should throw a party, invite all of our community to a celebration of marriage and provide 150 gallons of wine. If we are labeled drunkards and gluttons, at least we will be in good company (Matthew 11:19, Luke 7:34 NRSV). However, maybe there is another way to be radically hospitable, a way that engages support for the institution of marriage, love of community and love for God. I am pretty sure that if we get creative, Jesus will show up, marriages will be strengthened and miracles will happen.

January 31, 2016

Powerful and Personal

John 11:38-44

Our God is a powerful and personal God. From the very beginning in the two creation stories of Genesis 1 and 2 we find two very different characteristics of our God. In Genesis 1 we have a very powerful God that creates the world in a few days by merely speaking it into existence. God is not very personal, but God sure is powerful! In Genesis 2:4b and following we have a different order of creation and seemingly a very different God. This is the God that

(Continued on pg. 29: "LIVING WORD")

CLERGY & DIACONAL



DEATHS



The Rev. Charles R. Scott, 85, died Nov. 22, 2015. He began his ministerial career in 1953 at Concord. He went on to serve Nottoway, Powhatan, Boykins,

Bowling Green, Laurel Hill, Sherbourne Avenue and West End in Roanoke. In 1976, he became the chaplain at the Virginia United Methodist Children's Home. In 1980, he became administrator in training at Virginia United Methodist Homes, Inc. and then was named associate administrator at VUMH. After retiring in 1999, he served Memorial in Richmond, and then Laurel Park and Dunns Chapel in the former Ashland District. Charles' wife, Blanche, and two daughters survive him.



The Rev. Norma Jean Townsley Poole, of Stony Creek, died Nov. 9, 2015. Norma was a licensed local pastor and served the congregations of

Fort Grove and Sharon UMCs in Sussex County until her health declined. Her husband, David Poole, as well as two children and three stepchildren, survive her.



Chaplain Whitney W. Parrish, retired elder, 87, died Nov. 10, 2015. His parents, first wife, Mary Hutchinson Parrish, and his nine siblings

preceded him in death. His wife, Dixie, five children, grandchildren and great

grandchildren survive Whitney. Prior to entering the ministry, Whitney served 10 years in the Marine Corps. After resigning, he went to theological school and returned to the military as a Navy Chaplain where he served for 25 years. After retirement and moving to the Staunton area, Whitney served as interim pastor at St. John's Reformed United Church of Christ, Staunton, Newport UCC, Newport and at Shenandoah UCC. His last pastorate was the Rockbridge United Methodist Charge, Buena Vista and Lexington areas.



The Rev. James G. Holloman, 86, of Vinton, died Nov. 17, 2015. A native of Stantonsburg, N.C., he resided in various communities throughout

Virginia during his 47-year ministry with the Virginia Conference. Jim was a Navy veteran, serving as a radar man on the U.S.S. Dixie. He attended Ferrum Junior College, Washington and Lee University and graduated from Lynchburg College and Union Theological Seminary. Jim is survived by his wife of 61 years, Ann, four children, four grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.



The Rev. James Nelson Ritter, 79, of Winchester, died Nov. 28, 2015. He began his ministerial career in 1957 at Motley and then served as associ-

ate at Washington Street. He pastored Sussex, North Mathews, East Franklin, Franklin, Laurel Hill, Ivey Memorial, Pleasant Valley in the Winchester District, St. Mark's in the Alexandria District, Crewe, Zion in the former

Peninsula District, Aldersgate in the former Norfolk District, and St. Matthias in the former Ashland District. He retired in 1999 and served Irvington in the former Rappahannock District in his retirement. He enjoyed volunteering his time with Habitat for Humanity and was a member of the Emmaus Community, Clarke County Ruritan Club and Kairos Prison Ministry. His four children, five grandchildren and four great-grandchildren survive him.



Norman Allen, retired diaconal minister, died Nov. 18, 2015. Norman was a member of the Virginia diaconate and a mentor to many. Church

of Our Saviour, Charlottesville, held a memorial service Nov. 24. Norman was the longtime Music Minister at First United Methodist Church, Charlottesville, and upon his retirement, he served as organist in several other churches.

Pauline Hudson Brown, of Richmond, died Nov. 6, 2015. Her husband, **the Rev. Lee Roy Brown**, preceded her in death. She was an active member of Centenary Methodist Church. She married Lee Roy in 1954 and supported his ministry in United Methodist churches in Virginia Beach, Emporia, Charles City, Mechanicsville, Seaford, Dumfries, Vienna and Hampton. After Lee Roy's retirement in 1986, they settled in Richmond and were involved in many activities of Trinity UMC.

Ralph Howell Plasters, of Patrick Springs, died Nov. 10, 2015. His son and daughter-in-law, **the Rev. Mike Plasters** and **the Rev. Sandra Benton Plasters**, as well as his daughter and son-in-law, Teresa and Tommy Spencer, survive him.

Betty Ann Anderson Holton, 82, formerly of Roanoke, died peacefully after a long illness Nov. 20, 2015. Betty was a woman of faith and a life-long member of The United Methodist Church, first at Raleigh Court UMC in Roanoke, then in later years at Reveille UMC in Richmond. Her three children, including **the Rev. Dr. M. Jan Holton**, associate professor of Pastoral Care at Yale Divinity School whose charge conference connection is Reveille UMC, survive her.

Robert “Bob” Staul, 72, died Nov. 21, 2015, at Riverside Walter Reed Hospital. He was married to his high school sweetheart, **the Rev. Rita Staul**, for 53 years. Bob was a member of Salem/Olive Branch UMC, Gloucester, where Rita is pastor. He served 25 years in the United States Air Force and retired out of Langley, Yorktown. He then earned his Bachelor’s Degree from Saint Leo University and went to work for social services in Newport News. Bob was an all-star football and baseball player at Farrell High School. He was also the European Doubles Racquetball Champion while serving in the military and stationed in Germany. His two children, including **the Rev. Brent Staul** who is associate pastor at Tabernacle UMC in Poquoson, also survive Bob. A memorial service with military honors was officiated by the Rev. Rudy Tucker and the Rev. James Early Nov. 25 at Tabernacle UMC.

Richard Carl Benninghove died Nov. 22, 2015. He was also known as “Rev. B” or “Mr. B” and was known as a friend and mentor to many throughout the Virginia Conference. Richard’s wife of 32 years, **the Rev. Loretta Benninghove**, two stepsons and two grandchildren survive him. Keysville UMC, Farmville District, where Loretta is pastor, held A Service of Resurrection Nov. 29.

Charles Pearre died Nov. 23, 2015. Charles served as an Alexandria District Associate Lay Leader in the Woodbridge sub-district for many years. He was an active member at Old Bridge UMC in Woodbridge.

Miriam Kirkland, 86, mother of **the Rev. M. Davies Kirkland**, pastor of Dulin UMC in Falls Church, died Nov. 28, 2015. Miriam was a member at Westhampton UMC in Richmond.

MARRIAGES

The Rev. Katie B. Anthony, associate pastor at Reveille UMC, Richmond, married Matthew Gooch on Sept. 5, 2015.

BIRTHS

The Rev. Andrew Ware and his wife, **Sara**, welcomed Micah Andrew to their family on Sept. 22, 2015. Micah weighed 8.5 lbs. Andrew is pastor of Twin Grove Charge on the James River District. Also celebrating are grandparents, **Dale and Jackie Ware** of Virginia Beach and **Carl and the Rev. Sandra Stanley** of Ashland.

Dean Nelson Colwell was born to **Nelson** and **the Rev. Jessie Squires Colwell** on Nov. 20, 2015. Dean weighed 8 pounds and measured 20.7 inches. Jessie is associate pastor of Connect Ministries at Culpeper UMC, Charlottesville District.


The Rev. Mikang Kim and **the Rev. Donghwan Paul Oh** welcomed their daughter, Grace, Nov. 23, 2015. Mikang is pastor of Epworth in Exmore and Paul is pastor of Bethel and Belle Haven UMCs, Eastern Shore District.

(“LIVING WORD,” continued from pg. 27)

breathes into our nostrils the breath of life! It does not get much more personal than that! Later, God calls out searching for Adam and Eve. This is the God that walks with us, that gives us life in such a personal way. God’s power seems to be limited, but God’s wants to be in relationship with us. God is powerful and personal! What a great foreshadowing of the Jesus we see in our scripture today.

Shortly before our scripture today, Jesus is told that Lazarus is dead and he weeps (John 11:35 NRSV). This was the first scripture I ever memorized and it is perhaps the most important. Jesus weeps at the death of his friend. Jesus loves Lazarus, and Jesus loves us. This is the same personal God that we experience in the second creation story, a God that seeks us out to have relationship with us, a God that breathes life into our nostrils (during January that has a different meaning for us, especially if you have young kids)!

After Jesus weeps, he calmly walks to the grave, asks for the stone to be rolled away (foreshadowing again!), despite Martha’s insistence otherwise and speaks “with a loud voice” asking Lazarus to come out (John 11:43 NRSV). The personal, weeping Christ now does what the powerful God did in Genesis 1; Jesus is now speaking things into existence, speaking life into what was once lifeless.

The Creator God of the Hebrew Bible and the God of the New Testament in Jesus Christ are the same God. Just as the Creator made us and loved us, so Jesus loved us and made us new. The Spirit that once hovered over the great creation and once breathed life into Lazarus now calls us to realize that we are loved and given the gift of life. Thanks be to God! 

FROM THE BISHOP



Thy will
be done

Happy New Year! May the grace and peace from our risen Lord be with you.

The season of Christmas has passed, and we have welcomed a new year. God has given us a brand new opportunity to live for the glory of God. I pray this year will be filled with joy, peace and God's many blessings.

During this year, we will have many joys and celebrations, but also face many challenges and difficulties. We do not know our future, but we know who will lead us. We are not alone in our journey! Our risen Lord, who is faithful to keep his promises, is and will be with us. Therefore, we are very excited about the future our Lord will lead us into.

One of the important events on our schedules this year will be our General Conference (GC) which will be held in Portland, Ore., from May 10-20. Delegates representing The United Methodist Church from around the world will get together to celebrate

our mission and ministries, to envision the upcoming years, to consider petitions and to make changes in the *Book of Discipline*, if the church discerns it necessary.

My prayer and hope is that GC will faithfully and prayerfully discern the will of God and reflect God's will in making all its decisions. If GC becomes only a battleground for political agendas, it will be a great shame not only to the whole United Methodist Church, but also to our Lord who is the head of our denomination. All of us need humility, open-mindedness and a willingness to follow our Good Shepherd who leads us today.

The Council of Bishops has invited each Annual Conference to designate a day for a 24-hour prayer vigil for GC. These prayer vigils will be held for 131 days from Jan. 1, 2016, to the opening day of GC, May 10. Interestingly, The United Methodist Church has 131 annual conferences throughout the world. The Virginia Conference chose April 10 as our day for a prayer vigil. It will be a conference-wide day of prayer, especially for GC. The detailed plan on how we will organize our 24-hour prayer vigil will be announced later.

I believe a new future will dawn for us if we go back to the Lord and join the movement to restore a biblical, authentic and vital church. A reactive plan to save our denomination will not work. Introducing a couple of new initiatives or programs may help our churches to some degree, but this would be like putting on bandages and will not bring a new future. For the past 40 years, we have tried this many times, but we have not seen much fruit.

What does it mean to restore a biblical, authentic and vital church? We may discuss this question from many perspectives, but I think the most important thing is to truly honor and respect the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our mission and ministries. It

means to switch gears from my vision to Christ's vision and from my ministry to sharing in Christ's ministry.

We United Methodists often perceive ourselves to be too capable to humbly honor the Lordship of Jesus Christ and to seek the Lord's will. We try to do all our planning by ourselves and ask God's blessing in the end on our finalized plan. We are not used to seeking and discerning the Lord's will from the beginning to the end of our planning processes. So churches are busy doing many activities, but we do not plan or align our activities following God's will or God's vision for us. We may not have the spiritual depth to go in this direction.

It is for this reason that I emphasize that we need to open ourselves to God through deep prayer. This is the reason I say that we need to humbly seek the guidance of our Lord for our new future. We need to trust that God's plan is far better than our plan, and God's wisdom is far better than our wisdom. Do we truly believe that Jesus Christ is the head of our church? Do we truly believe that the foolishness of God is wiser than our wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than our strength (1 Cor. 1:25)?

Seeking God's way will always be the best way for our lives and for the church, although God's way is not always a highway. So, when we pray, especially for GC, we need to pray that God's will be done in our GC as it is in heaven. I love this hymn:

Have thine own way, Lord!

Have thine own way!

Thou are the potter, I am the clay.

Mold me and make me after thy will

while I am waiting yielded and still. 🇺🇸

In our Lord,

Young Jin Cho

ONE LAST WORD

GIVE US, SENOR, A LITTLE SUN, A
LITTLE HAPPINESS
AND SOME WORK.

GIVE US A HEART TO COMFORT
THOSE IN PAIN.

GIVE US THE ABILITY TO BE
GOOD, STRONG, WISE AND FREE
SO THAT WE MAY BE AS
GENEROUS WITH OTHERS AS WE
ARE WITH OURSELVES.

FINALLY, SENOR, LET US ALL
LIVE AS YOUR OWN ONE FAMILY.

AMEN

-Taken from a church wall in Mexico

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